



'Now then,' as she rushed into the breakers, 'pull together, rowers all, and with a will.'—Page 55

ABRIDGED EDITION FOR SCHOOLS

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# HEREWARD THE WAKE

‘Last of the English’

BY

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# HEREWARD THE WAKE

## ‘Last of the English’

### CHAPTER I

#### HOW HEReward WAS OUTLAWED (1)

IN Kesteven of Lincolnshire, between the forest and the fen, lies the good market-town of Bourne.

A pleasant place, and a rich, is Bourne now; and a pleasant place and rich must it have been in the old Anglo-Danish times. To the south and west stretched, as now, the illimitable flat of fen, with the spires of Crowland gleaming bright between high trees upon the southern horizon; and to the north, from the very edge of the town fields, rose the great Brunneswald, the forest of oak, and ash, and elm, which still covers many miles of Lincolnshire. Mighty fowling and fishing was there in the fen below, and mighty hunting on the weald above.

It is of early days that this story tells, of the latter half of the eleventh century, and the eve of the Norman Conquest, when Leofric the Earl had the dominion in forest and manorial rights, in wood, and town, and fen; and beside him, upon the rich strip of champaign, other free Danish holders, whose names may be still found in Domesday-book, held small estates; and owed, probably, some military service to the great earl at the hall.

Known, I presume, to all is Lady Godiva, mistress of



Bourne, the most beautiful as well as the most saintly woman of her day.

Less known, save to students, is her husband Leofric, whose bones lie by those of Godiva in the famous minster of Coventry; less known, again, are the children of that illustrious pair; Algar, or Alfgar, Earl of Mercia after his father, who died after a short and stormy life, leaving two sons, Edwin and Morcar, the fair and hapless young earls, always spoken of together, as if they had been twins.

Leofric's second son was Hereward, whose history this tale sets forth; his third and youngest, a boy whose name is unknown.

Godiva was almost the greatest lady in England, and might have been proud enough, had she been inclined to that pleasant sin. But always (for there is a skeleton, they say, in every house) she carried that about her which might well keep her humble; namely, shame at the misconduct of Hereward, her son.

Now on a day—about the year 1040—Lady Godiva sat, not at her hall-door, dealing food and clothing to her thirteen poor folk, but in her bower, with her youngest son, a two-years' boy, at her knee. She was listening with a face of shame and horror to the complaint of Herluin, steward of Peterborough, who had fallen in that afternoon with Hereward and his crew of house-carles.

They had met him riding along, intent upon his psalter, home towards his abbey from its cell at Bourne—'Whereon your son, most gracious lady, bade me stand, saying that his men were thirsty; and he had no money to buy ale withal, and none so likely to help him thereto as a fat priest.

'But when he saw who I was, as if inspired by a malignant spirit, he shouted out my name, and bade his companions throw me to the ground.'

'Throw you to the ground?' shuddered the Lady Godiva.

‘In much mire, madam. After which he took my palfrey, saying that heaven’s gate was too lowly for men on horseback to get in thereat, and then my marten’s fur gloves and cape which your gracious self bestowed on me, alleging that the rules of my order allowed only one garment, and no furs save catskins and suchlike. And lastly—I tremble while I relate, thinking not of the loss of my poor money, but the loss of an immortal soul—took from me a purse with sixteen silver pennies, which I had collected from our tenants for the use of the monastery, and so left me to trudge hither in the mire’

‘Wretched boy!’ said the Lady Godiva, and hid her face in her hands; ‘and more wretched I, to have brought such a son into the world!’

The monk had hardly finished his doleful story, when there was a pattering of heavy feet, a noise of men shouting and laughing outside, and a voice above all calling for the monk by name which made that good man crouch behind the curtain of Lady Godiva’s bed. The next moment the door of the bower was thrown violently open, and in swaggered a noble lad eighteen years old. His face was of extraordinary beauty, save that the lower jaw was too long and heavy, and that his eyes wore a strange and almost sinister expression, from the fact that the one of them was gray, and the other blue. He was short, but of immense breadth of chest and strength of limb; while his delicate hands and feet and long locks of golden hair marked him of most noble, and even, as he really was, of ancient royal race. He was dressed in a gaudy costume, resembling on the whole that of a Highland chieftain. His wrists and throat were tattooed in blue patterns, and he carried sword and dagger, a gold ring round his neck, and gold rings on his wrists. He was a lad to have gladdened the eyes of any mother: but there was no gladness in the Lady Godiva’s eyes as she received him, nor had there been for many a year. She looked on him with sternness, with all but horror. and he, his face flushed with wine, which he had tossed off as he passed through

the hall to steady his nerves for the coming storm, looked at her with smiling defiance, the result of long estrangement between mother and son.

'Well, my lady,' said he, 'ere she could speak, 'I heard that this good fellow was here; and came home as fast as I could, to see that he told you as few lies as possible.'

'He has told me,' said she, 'that you have robbed the Church of God.'

'Robbed him, it may be, an old hoody crow, against whom I have a grudge of ten years' standing.'

'Hereward, Hereward!' cried his mother, 'godless, God-forgotten boy, what words are these?' and she sprang up, and seizing his arm, laid her hand upon his mouth.

*Kesteven.* The central division of the county of Lincoln.

*Fen.* Wild, uncultivated marshland.

*The old Anglo-Danish times* From about 1016 to 1042

*Mercia.* The great Anglo-Saxon kingdom of Middle England

*Illimitable.* Almost boundless in extent.

*Crouland.* A famous abbey eight miles from Peterborough.

*Wald.* A wooded region.

*Dominion in forest and manorial rights.* The right of killing game in the forest, and of possessing a manor or estate with tenants

*Champaign* Flat, open country.

*Holders.* Freemen who held land.

*Military service* An obligation to help their lord in time of war

*Her thirteen poor folk.* Lady Godiva kept, at her own expense, thirteen poor folk wherever she went.

*Bower.* An apartment for women.

*Peterborough.* A city in Northamptonshire, where was a magnificent abbey, founded in 655. The ancient name of Peterborough was Medehamptstead. The abbey, from its great wealth, was often known as the Golden Borough.

*Housecarles* Men-at-arms.

*Psalter* The Book of Psalms.

*Its cell at Bourne.* The monks of Peterborough had founded a cell outside the castle walls at Bourne.

*Withal.* Besides; along with the rest

*Malignant.* Very evil and malicious.



'He has told me,' said she, 'that you have robbed the Church of God.'

'Robbed him, it may be, an old hoody crow, against whom I have a grudge of ten years,' standing. —Page 8.

*Mire.* Deep mud.

*Palfrey.* A small horse.

*Marten* An animal like a weasel, with beautiful fur.

*Order.* The order of monkhood to which Herluin belonged

*Sinister.* Dishonest, here means unpleasing.

*Hooded crow* A hooded crow; a bird of ash-gray plumage, with black feathers on the head and neck. A monk wearing his cowl might bear a fancied resemblance to such a bird.

*Estrangement.* Keeping at a distance after a quarrel.

## CHAPTER II

### HOW HEReward WAS OUTLAWED (2)

HEREWARD looked at her majestic face, once lovely, now stern and careworn; and trembled for a moment. Had there been any tenderness in it, his history might have been a very different one: but, alas! there was none. Not that she was in herself untender. but that her great piety was so outraged by this insult to that clergy whose willing slave she had become, that the only method of reclaiming the sinner had been long forgotten in genuine horror at his sin. 'Is it not enough,' she went on sternly, 'that you should have become the bully and the ruffian of all the fens?—that Hereward the leaper, Hereward the wrestler, Hereward the thrower of the hammer—sports after all only fit for the sons of slaves, should be also Hereward the drunkard, Hereward the common fighter, Hereward the breaker of houses, Hereward the leader of mobs of boon companions who bring back to us, in shame and sorrow, the days when our heathen forefathers ravaged this land with fire and sword? Is it not enough for me that my son should be a common stabber——?'

'Whoever called me stabber to you, lies. If I have killed men, or had them killed, I have done it in fair fight.'

But she went on unheeding—'Is it not enough that after having squandered on your fellows all the money

that you could wring from my bounty or win at your base sports, you should have robbed your own father, collected his rents behind his back, taken money and goods from his tenants by threats and blows : but that, after outraging them, you must add to all this a worse sin likewise, outraging God, and driving me—me who have borne with you, me who have concealed all for your sake—to tell your father that of which the very telling will turn my hair to gray ?’

‘So you will tell my father ?’ said Hereward coolly.

And he swaggered out of the room.

When he was gone the Lady Godiva bowed her head into her lap, and wept long and bitterly. Neither her maidens nor the priest dare speak to her for nigh an hour ; but at the end of that time she lifted up her head, and settled her face again, till it was like that of a marble saint over a minster door, and called for ink and paper, and wrote her letter, and then asked for a trusty messenger who should carry it up to Westminster.

‘None so swift or sure,’ said the house steward, ‘as Martin Lightfoot.’

Lady Godiva shook her head. ‘I mistrust that man,’ she said. ‘He is too fond of my poor—of the Lord Hereward.’

‘He is a strange one, my lady, and no one knows whence he came, and I sometimes fancy whither he may go either ; but ever since my lord threatened to hang him for talking with my young master, he has never spoken to him, nor scarcely, indeed, to a living soul. And one thing there is makes him or any man sure, as long as he is well paid, and that is, that he cares for nothing in heaven or earth save himself and what he can get.’

So Martin Lightfoot was sent for. He came in straight into the lady’s bedchamber, after the simple fashion of those days. He was a tall, bony man, as was to be expected from his nickname ; lean as a rake, with a long hooked nose, a scanty brown beard, and a high conical head. His only garment was a shabby gray woollen tunic

which served him both as coat and kilt, and laced brogues of untanned hide. He might have been any age from twenty to forty; but his face was disfigured with deep scars and long exposure to the weather. He dropped on one knee, holding his greasy cap in his hand, and looked, not at his lady's face, but at her feet, with a stupid and frightened expression.

'Martin,' said the lady, 'they tell me that you are a silent and a prudent man.'

'That am I.'

'I shall try you; do you know your way to London? To your lord's lodgings?'

'Yes.'

'How long shall you be going there with this letter?'

'A day and a half.'

'When shall you be back hither?'

'On the fourth day.'

'And you will go to my lord and deliver this letter safely?'

'Yes.'

'And safely bring back an answer?'

'Nay, not that.'

'Not that?'

Martin made a doleful face, and drew his hand first across his leg, and then across his throat, as hints of the doom which he expected.

'He—the Lord Hereward—has promised not to let thee be harmed.'

Martin gave a start, and his dull eyes flashed out a moment; but the next he answered, as curtly as was his wont—

'The more fool he. But women's bodkins are sharp as well as men's knives.'

'Bodkins? Whose? What babblest of?'

'Them,' said Martin, pointing to the bower maidens—girls of good family who stood round; chosen for their beauty, after the fashion of those times, to attend on great ladies. There was a cry of angry and contemptuous



'And you will go to my lord and deliver this letter safely?'—Page 12.



denial, not unmixed with something like laughter, which showed that Martin had but spoken the truth. Hereward, in spite of all his sins, was the darling of his mother's bower, and there was not one of the damsels but would have done anything short of murder to have prevented Martin carrying the letter.

'Silence, man!' said Lady Godiva, so sternly that Martin saw that he had gone too far. 'How knows such as thou what is in this letter?'

'All the town must know,' said Martin sullenly.

'Best that they should, and know that right is done here,' said she, trying to be stern.

'I will take it,' said Martin. He held out his hand, took it and looked at it, but upside down and without any attempt to read it.

'His own mother,' said he, after a while.

'What is that to thee?' said Lady Godiva, blushing and kindling.

'Nothing—I had no mother. But God has one.'

'What meanest thou, knave? Wilt thou take the letter or no?'

'I will take it.' And he again looked at it, without rising off his knee. 'His own father, too.'

'What is that to thee, I say again?'

'Nothing—I have no father. But God's Son has one.'

'What wilt thou, thou strange man?' asked she, puzzled and half-frightened; 'and how camest thou, again I ask, to know what is in this letter?'

'All the town, I say again, must know. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hid. On the fourth day from this I will be back.'

*Conical.* Rising to a point.

*Brogues.* Rough shoes.

*Bodkins.* Large blunt needles.

*Babble.* To talk foolishly.

*Knave.* A low fellow; a rogue.

## CHAPTER III

## HOW HEReward WENT NORTH TO SEEK HIS FORTUNE

[Leaving his father's house the next day, Hereward mounted his best horse, and, armed from head to foot, rode over to Peterborough, where his uncle Brand was Prior of the famous Abbey.]

ON the fifth day came Martin Lightfoot, and found Hereward in Prior Brand's private cell.

'Well?' asked Hereward coolly.

'Is he——? Is he——?' stammered Brand, and could not finish his sentence.

Martin nodded.

Hereward laughed—a loud, swaggering, uneasy laugh.

'See what it is to be born of just and pious parents. Come, Master Trot-alone, speak out and tell us all about it. Thy lean wolf's legs have run to some purpose. Open thy lean wolf's mouth and speak for once, lest I ease thy legs for the rest of thy life by a cut across the hams. Find thy lost tongue, I say!'

'Walls have ears, as well as the wild wood,' said Martin.

'We are safe here,' said the prior, 'so speak, and tell us the whole truth.'

'Well, when the earl read the letter, he turned red, and pale again, and then nought but—"Men, follow me to the king at Westminster." So we went, all with our weapons, twenty or more, along the Strand, and up into the king's new hall; and a grand hall it is, but not easy to get into, for the crowd of monks and beggars on the stairs, hindering honest folks' business. And there sat the king on a high settle, with his pink face and white hair, looking as royal as a bell-wether new washed; and on either side of him, on the same settle, sat the old fox and the young wolf. And your father walked up the hall, his left hand on his sword-hilt, looking an earl all over, as he is.'

‘He is that,’ said Hereward in a low voice.

‘And he bowed ; and cried as he stood :—

“Justice, my lord the king !”

‘And at that the king turned pale, and said : “ Who ? What ? O miserable world ! O last days drawing nearer and nearer ! O earth, full of violence and blood ! Who has wronged thee now, most dear and noble earl ? ”

“Justice against my own son.”

‘And your father got a parchment, with an outlandish Norman seal hanging to it, and sent me off with it that same night to give to the lawman. So wolf’s head you are, my lord, and there is no use crying over spilt milk.’

‘My poor boy, there will be many a one whom thou hast wronged only too ready to lie in wait for thee, now thy life is in every man’s hand. If the outlawry is published, thou hadst best start to-night, and get past Lincoln before morning.’

‘I shall stay quietly here, and get a good night’s rest ; and then ride out to-morrow morning in the face of the whole shire. No, not a word ! You would not have me sneak away like a coward ?’

Brand smiled and shrugged his shoulders . being very much of the same mind.

‘At least go north.’

‘And why north ?’

‘You have no quarrel in Northumberland, and the king’s writ runs very slowly there, if at all.’

It was four o’clock on a May morning when Hereward set out to see the world, with good armour on his back, good weapon by his side, good horse between his knees, and—rare luxury in those penniless, though otherwise plentiful days—good money in his purse.

As he rode on, slowly though cheerfully, as a man who will not tire his horse at the beginning of a long day’s journey, and knows not where he shall pass the night, he was aware of a man on foot coming up behind him at a slow, steady, wolf-like trot, which in spite of its slowness

gained ground on him so fast, that he saw at once that the man could be no common runner.

The man came up; and behold, he was none other than Martin Lightfoot.

'What! art thou here?' asked Hereward suspiciously, and half cross at seeing any visitor from the old world which he had just cast off. 'How gottest thou out of St. Peter's last night?'

Martin's tongue was hanging out of his mouth like a running hound's; but he seemed, like a hound, to perspire through his mouth; for he answered without the least sign of distress, without even pulling in his tongue.

'Over the wall, the moment the prior's back was turned. I was not going to wait till I was chained up in some rat's hole with a half-hundred of iron on my leg, and flogged till I confessed that I was what I am not—a run-away monk.'

'And why art here?'

'Because I am going with you.'

'Going with me?' said Hereward. 'What can I do for thee?'

'I can do for you,' said Martin.

'What?'

'Groom your horse, wash your shirt, clean your weapons, find your inn, fight your enemies, cheat your friends—anything and everything. You are going to see the world. I am going with you.'

'Thou canst be my servant? A right slippery one, I expect,' said Hereward, looking down on him with some suspicion.

'Some are not the rogues they seem. I can keep my secrets and yours too.'

'Before I can trust thee with my secrets, I shall expect to know some of thine,' said Hereward.

Martin Lightfoot looked up with a cunning smile. 'A man can always know his master's secrets if he likes. But that is no reason a master should know his man's.'



The man came up, and behold, he was none other than Martin Lightfoot.—Page 17

'Thou shalt tell me thine, man, or I shall ride off and leave thee.'

'Not so easy, my lord. Where that heavy horse can go, Martin Lightfoot can follow.'

'Now, what has made thee take service with me?'

'Because you are you.'

'Give me none of thy parables and dark sayings, but speak out like a man. What canst see in me that thou shouldest share an outlaw's fortune with me?'

'I had run away from a monastery; so had you. I hated the monks; so did you. You let yourself be outlawed, like a true hero. You made up your mind to see the world, like a true hero. You are the master for me, and with you I will live and die. And now I can talk no more.'

'And with me thou shalt live and die,' said Hereward, pulling up his horse, and frankly holding out his hand to his new friend.

Martin Lightfoot took his hand, kissed it, licked it almost, as a dog would have done. 'I am your man,' he said, 'amen; and true man I will prove to you, if you will prove true to me.' And he dropped quietly back behind Hereward's horse, as if the business of his life was settled, and his mind utterly at rest.

And so those two went northward through the green Bruneswald, and northward through merry Sherwood, and were not seen in that land again for many a year.

*Swaggering.* Boasting or bragging noisily.

*Hams.* The hind part of the knee.

*The king.* Edward the Confessor.

*The Strand.* A street which in those days joined the two cities of London and Westminster. It took its name from running along the shore or strand of the river Thames.

*The king's new hall.* Westminster Hall.

*Settle.* A long seat with a high back.

*Bell-wether.* An old sheep who leads the flock.

*The old fox and the young wolf.* Earl Godwin and Harold his son.

*Outlandish.* Strange or foreign in appearance.

*Lawman.* The king's officer who administered law in a certain district.

*Wolf's head.* An outlaw; so called because he might be slain by any one as if he were a wild animal.

## CHAPTER IV

## HOW HEREWARD SLEW THE BEAR

OF Hereward's doings for the next few months nought is known; the chroniclers only say that he was in those days beyond Northumberland with Gilbert of Ghent.

Wherever Gilbert lived, however, he heard that Hereward was outlawed, and sent for him, having, it would seem, some connection with his father. And there he lived, doubtless happily enough, fighting Celts and hunting deer, so that as yet the pains and penalties of exile did not press very hardly upon him. The handsome, petulant, good-humoured lad had become in a few weeks the darling of Gilbert's ladies, and the envy of all his knights and gentlemen. Hereward the singer, harp-player, dancer, Hereward the rider and hunter, was in all mouths; but he himself was discontented at having as yet fallen in with no adventure worthy of a man; and he looked curiously and longingly at the menagerie of wild beasts enclosed in strong wooden cages, which Gilbert kept in one corner of the great courtyard, to try with them, at Christmas, Easter, and Whitsuntide, the mettle of the young gentlemen who were candidates for the honour of knighthood. But after looking over the bulls and stags, wolves and bears, Hereward settled it in his mind that there was none worthy of his steel, save one huge white bear, whom no man had yet dared to face, and whom Hereward, indeed, had never seen, hidden as he was all day within the old oven-shaped house of stone, which had been turned into his den.

Meanwhile Hereward made a friend. Among all the ladies of Gilbert's household, however kind they were inclined to be to him, he took a fancy only to one—a little girl of ten years old. Alftruda was her name. He liked to amuse himself with this child, without, as he fancied, any danger of falling in love. Alftruda was beautiful, too,

exceedingly, and precocious, and, it may be, vain enough to repay his attentions in good earnest. Moreover she was English, as he was, and royal likewise. Between the English lad, then, and the English maiden grew up in a few weeks an innocent friendship, which had almost become more than friendship, through the intervention of the great white bear.

For as Hereward was coming in one afternoon from hunting, hawk on fist, with Martin Lightfoot trotting behind, crane and heron, duck and hare, slung over his shoulder, on reaching the courtyard gates he was aware of screams and shouts within, tumult and terror among man and beast. Hereward tried to force his horse in at the gate. The beast stopped and turned, snorting with fear; and no wonder; for in the midst of the courtyard stood the bear; his white mane bristled up till he seemed twice as big as any of the sober brown bears which Hereward yet had seen: his long snake neck and cruel visage wreathing about in search of prey. A dead horse, its back broken by a single blow of the paw, and two or three writhing dogs, showed that the beast had turned (like too many of his human kindred in those days) 'Berserker.' The courtyard was utterly empty: but from the ladies' bower came shrieks and shouts, not only of women but of men; and knocking at the bower door, adding her screams to those inside, was a little white figure, which Hereward recognised as Alfruda's. They had barricaded themselves inside, leaving the child out; and now dared not open the door, as the bear swung and rolled towards it, looking savagely right and left for a fresh victim.

Hereward leaped from his horse, and drawing his sword, rushed forward with a shout which made the bear turn round.

He looked once back at the child; then round again at Hereward: and making up his mind to take the largest morsel first, made straight at him with a growl which there was no mistaking.

He was within two paces; then he rose on his hind



legs, a head and shoulders taller than Hereward, and lifted the iron talons high in air. Hereward knew that there was but one spot at which to strike; and he struck true and strong, before the iron paw could fall, right on the muzzle of the monster.

He heard the dull crash of the steel; he felt the sword jammed tight. He shut his eyes for an instant, fearing lest, as in dreams, his blow had come to nought, lest his sword had turned aside, or melted like water in his hand, and the next moment would find him crushed to earth, blinded and stunned. Something tugged at his sword. He opened his eyes, and saw the huge carcase bend, reel, roll slowly over to one side, dead, tearing out of his hand the sword which was firmly fixed into the skull.

Hereward stood awhile staring at the beast like a man astonished at what he himself had done. He had had his first adventure, and he had conquered. He was now a champion in his own right—a hero of the heroes.

‘Do you not see,’ said Martin Lightfoot’s voice close by, ‘that there is a fair lady trying to thank you, while you are so rude or so proud that you will not vouchsafe her one look?’

It was true. Little Alfruda had been clinging to him for five minutes past. He took the child up in his arms and kissed her with pure kisses, which for a moment softened his hard heart; then setting her down, he turned to Martin

‘I have done it, Martin’

‘Yes, you have done it; I spied you. What will the old folks at home say to this?’

‘What care I?’

Martin Lightfoot shook his head, and drew out his knife.

‘What is that for?’ said Hereward.

‘When the master kills the game, the knave can but skin it. We may sleep warm under this fur in many a cold night by sea and moor.’

‘Nay,’ said Hereward, laughing; ‘when the master kills the game, he must first carry it home. Let us take him and set him up against the bower door there, to

astonish the brave knights inside.' And stooping down, he attempted to lift the huge carcase: but in vain. At last, with Martin's help, he got it fairly on his shoulders, and the two dragged their burden to the bower, and dashed it against the door, shouting with all their might to those within to open it.

Windows, it must be remembered, were in those days so few and far between, that the folks inside had remained quite unaware of what was going on without.

The door was opened cautiously enough; and out looked, to the shame of knighthood, be it said, two or three knights who had taken shelter in the bower with the ladies. Whatever they were going to say the ladies forestalled, for, rushing out across the prostrate bear, they overwhelmed Hereward with praises, thanks, and, after the straightforward custom of those days, with substantial kisses.

'You must be knighted at once,' cried they. 'You have knighted yourself by that single blow.'

'A pity then,' said one of the knights to the others, 'that he had not given that accolade to himself, instead of to the bear.'

'Unless some means are found,' said another, 'of taking down this boy's conceit, life will soon be not worth having here.'

'Either he must take ship,' said a third, 'and look for adventures elsewhere, or I must.'

Martin Lightfoot heard those words; and knowing that envy and hatred, like all other vices in those rough-hewn times, were apt to take very startling and unmistakable shapes, kept his eye accordingly on those three knights.

*Gilbert of Ghent.* A brave soldier from Ghent in Flanders, who had settled upon the east coast of Scotland. He joined William the Conqueror at the invasion of England, and was put in command first of York and then of Lincoln.

*Celts* The natives of Scotland.

*Petulant.* Fiery in temper; impatient.

*Menagerie.* A place where wild beasts are confined.

*Mettle.* Spirit, or courage.



Rushing out across the postulate boat, they over whelmed Hereward with praises, thanks, and, after the straightforward custom of those days, with substantial kisses, —Page 23

*Worthy of his steel.* Of sufficient importance to fight with.

*Precocious.* Clever at an early age.

*Berserker.* A term applied to the wild Norse warriors of great strength and courage, who fought on the battle-field with frenzy. The name is said to come from the habit the fiercest of them had in fighting without armour, in their *bare sark*, or shirt. To "turn Berserker" is to become possessed with ungovernable fury.

*Barricaded.* Secured themselves strongly.

*Talons.* Claws.

*Muzzle.* The nose or mouth.

*Vouchsafe.* To design ; to condescend.

*Forestalled.* To perform an act before some one else is able to do it.

*Accolade.* The touch upon the shoulder with a sword by which a man was knighted.

## CHAPTER V

### HOW HEReward WON HIS NAME

No one was so well content with himself as Hereward ; and therefore he fancied that the world must be equally content with him , and he was much disconcerted when Martin drew him aside one day, and whispered—

‘If I were my lord, I should wear a mail shirt under my coat to-morrow out hunting.’

‘What ?’

‘The arrow that can go through a deer’s blade-bone can go through a man’s.’

‘Who should harm me ?’

‘Any man of the dozen who eat at the same table.’

‘What have I done to them ? If I had my laugh at them, they had their laugh at me ; and we are quits.’

‘There is another score, my lord, which you have forgotten, and that is all on your side.’

‘Eh ?’

‘You killed the bear. Do you expect them to forgive you that, till they have repaid you with interest ?’

‘Pish !’

‘You do not want for wit, my lord. Use it, and think What right has a little boy like you to come here, killing bears which grown men cannot kill?’

Hereward took his advice, and rode out with three or four knights the next morning into the fir-forest; not afraid, but angry and sad.

So they rode into the forest, and parted, each with his footman and his dogs, in search of boar and deer; and each had his sport without meeting again for some two hours or more.

Hereward and Martin came at last to a narrow gully, a murderous place enough. Huge fir-trees roofed it in, and made a night of noon. High banks of earth and great boulders walled it in right and left for twenty feet above. The track, what with pack-horses’ feet, and what with the wear and tear of five hundred years’ rainfall, was a rut three feet deep and two feet broad, in which no horse could turn. Any other day Hereward would have cantered down it with merely a tightened rein. To-day he turned to Martin, and said—

‘A very fit and proper place for this same treason. unless thou hast been drinking beer and thinking beer.’

But Martin was nowhere to be seen.

A pebble thrown from the right bank struck him, and he looked up. Martin’s face was peering through the heather overhead, his finger on his lips. Then he pointed cautiously, first up the pass, then down.

Hereward felt that his sword was loose in the sheath, and then gripped his lance, with a heart beating, but not with fear.

The next moment he heard the rattle of a horse’s hoofs behind him, looked back, and saw a knight charging desperately down the gully, his bow in hand, and arrow drawn to the head.

To turn was impossible. To stop, even to walk on, was to be ridden over and hurled to the ground helplessly. To gain the mouth of the gully, and then turn on his pursuer, was his only chance. For the first and almost the last

time in his life, he struck spurs into his horse, and ran away. As he went, an arrow struck him sharply in the back, piercing the corslet, but hardly entering the flesh. As he neared the mouth, two other knights crashed their horses through the brushwood from right and left, and stood awaiting him, their spears ready to strike. He was caught in a trap. A shield might have saved him; but he had none.

He did not flinch. Dropping his reins, and driving in the spurs once more, he met them in full shock. With his left hand he thrust aside the left-hand lance, with his right he hurled his own with all his force at the right-hand foe, and saw it pass clean through the felon's chest, while his lance-point dropped, and passed harmlessly.

So much for lances in front. But the knight behind? Would not his sword the next moment be through his brain?

There was a clatter, a crash, and looking back, Hereward saw horse and man rolling in the rut, and rolling with them Martin Lightfoot. He had already pinned the knight's head against the steep bank, and, with uplifted axe, was meditating a pick at his face which would have stopped alike his love-making and his fighting.

'Hold thy hand,' shouted Hereward. 'Let us see who he is; and remember that he is at least a knight.'

'But one that will ride no more to-day. I finished his horse's going as I rolled down the bank.'

It was true. He had broken the poor beast's leg with a blow of the axe, and they had to kill the horse out of pity ere they left.

Martin dragged his prisoner forward.

'You?' cried Hereward. 'And I saved your life three days ago!'

The knight answered nothing.

'You will have to walk home. Let that be punishment enough for you.' And he turned.

'He will have to ride in a woodman's cart, if he have the luck to find one'



He did not flinch. Dropping his reins, and driving in the spurs once more, he met them in full shock. With his left hand he thrust aside the left-hand force, with his right he hurled his own with all his force at the right-hand foe.—Page 27.

The third knight had fled, and after him the dead man's horse. Hereward and his man rode home in peace, and the wounded man, after trying vainly to walk a mile or two, fell and lay, and was fain to fulfil Martin's prophecy, and be brought home in a cart.

And so was Hereward avenged of his enemies; and began to win for himself the famous nickname of 'Wake'; the Watcher, whom no man ever took unawares.

And he armed himself *cap-à-pié*, and rode away. Great was the weeping in the bower, and great the chuckling in the hall: but never saw they Hereward again upon the Scottish shore.

*Mail shirt.* Light armour worn on the body.

*Pish.* An expression of contempt.

*Gully.* A narrow place between high banks.

*Boulders.* Great masses of rock.

*Pack-horses.* Horses used for conveying merchandise from one place to another. They were driven in one long line, and so wore the roadway into a narrow track.

*Corslet.* A light piece of armour for covering the body.

*Felon.* A base man; a criminal.

*Cap-à-pié.* From head to foot.

## CHAPTER VI

### HOW HEREWARD SUCCOURED A PRINCESS OF CORNWALL (1)

THE next place in which Hereward appeared was far away on the south-west, upon the Cornish shore. He went into port on board a merchant ship carrying wine, and intending to bring back tin. The merchants had told him of one Alef, a valiant prince living at Gweek, up the Helford river, who was indeed a distant connection of Hereward himself. He sailed in over a rolling bar, between jagged points of black rock, and up a tide river which wandered and branched away inland like a landlocked lake, between



high green walls of oak and ash, till they saw at the head of the tide Alef's town, nestling in a glen which sloped onwards the southern sun.

They discovered, besides, two ships drawn up upon the beach, whose long lines and snake heads, beside the stoat carved on the beak-head of one, and the adder on that of the other, bore witness to the piratical habits of their owner. The merchants, it seemed, were well known to the Cornishmen on shore, and Hereward went up with them unopposed; past the ugly dykes and muddy leats, where Alef's slaves were streaming the gravel for tin ore; through rich alluvial pastures spotted with red cattle; and up to Alef's town. Earthworks and stockades surrounded a little church of ancient stone, and a cluster of granite cabins thatched with turf, in which the slaves abode.

In the centre of all a vast stone barn, with low walls and high sloping roof, contained Alef's family, treasures, housecarles, horses, cattle, and pigs. They entered at one end between the pigstyes, passed on through the cow-stalls, then through the stables; till they saw before them, dim through the reek of peat-smoke, a long oaken table, at which sat huge dark-haired Cornishmen, with here and there among them the yellow head of a Norseman, who were Alef's following of fighting men. Boiled meat was there in plenty, barley cakes and ale.

At the head of the table, on a high-backed settle, was Alef himself, a jolly giant, who was just setting to work to drink himself stupid with mead made from heather honey. By his side sate a lovely dark-haired girl, with great gold torcs upon her throat and wrists, and a great gold brooch fastening a shawl which had plainly come from the looms of Spain or of the East; and next to her again, feeding her with tit-bits cut off with his own dagger, and laid on barley cake instead of a plate, sat a more gigantic personage even than Alef, the biggest man that Hereward had ever seen, with high cheek-bones and small ferret eyes, looking out from a greasy mass of bright red hair and beard.

No questions were asked of the newcomers. They set themselves down in silence in empty places, and according to the laws of the good old Cornish hospitality, were allowed to eat and drink their fill before they spoke a word.

‘Welcome here again, friend,’ said Alef at last, in good enough Danish, calling the eldest merchant by name. ‘Do you bring wine?’

The merchant nodded.

‘And you want tin?’

The merchant nodded again, and lifting his cup drank Alef’s health.

‘And you, fair sir,’ said Alef, looking keenly at Hereward, ‘by what name shall I call you, and what service can I do for you? You look more like an earl’s son than a merchant, and are come here surely for other things besides tin’

‘Health to King Alef,’ said Hereward, raising the cup. ‘Who I am I will tell to none but Alef’s self: but an earl’s son I am, though an outlaw and a rover. My lands are the breadth of my boot sole. My plough is my sword. My treasure is my good right hand. Nothing I have, and nothing I need, save to serve noble kings and earls, and win me a champion’s fame. If you have battles to fight, tell me, that I may fight them for you. If you have none, thank God for his peace; and let me eat and drink, and go in peace.’

‘King Alef needs neither man nor boy to fight his battle as long as Ironhook sits in his hall.’

It was the red-bearded giant who spoke, in a broken tongue, part Scotch, part Cornish, part Danish, which Hereward could hardly understand. but that the ogre intended to insult him he understood well enough.

Hereward had hoped to find giants in Cornwall; and behold he had found one at once, though rather, to judge from his looks, a Pictish than a Cornish giant; and true to his reckless determination to defy and fight every man and beast who was willing to defy and fight him, he turned

on his elbow and stared at Ironhook in scorn, meditating some speech which might provoke the hoped-for quarrel.

As he did so his eye happily caught that of the fair princess. She was watching him with a strange look, admiring, warning, imploring; and when she saw that he noticed her, she laid her finger on her lip in token of silence, crossed herself devoutly, and then laid her finger on her lips again, as if beseeching him to be patient and silent in the name of the heavenly powers.

*Helford river.* An inlet of the sea, 5 miles from Falmouth.

*Bar.* A bank or spit of sand at the mouth of a river.

*Stoat.* A small destructive animal like a weasel.

*Leats.* Channels made for carrying away water.

*Streaming the gravel.* Washing the gravel to get the metal it contained.

*Alluvial.* That which has been added to the land by the action of water.

*Stockades.* Strong wooden palings, used as a defence.

*Reek.* Vapour.

*Mead.* A strong, sweet drink.

*Torcs.* Bracelets to wear upon the wrist.

*Ogre.* A giant.

## CHAPTER VII

### HOW HEREWARD SUCCOURED A PRINCESS OF CORNWALL (2)

THE next morning, as Hereward went out to wash his face and hands in the brook below (he being the only man in the house who did so), Martin Lightfoot followed him.

‘What is it, Martin? Hast thou had too much of that sweet mead last night that thou must come out to cool thy head too?’

‘I came out for two reasons—first to see fair play, in case that Ironhook should come to wash his ugly visage, and find you on all fours over the brook—you understand? And next to tell you what I heard last night among the maids.’

‘And what didst thou hear?’

‘Fine adventures, if we can but compass them. You saw that lady with the carrot-headed fellow? I saw that you saw. Well, if you will believe me, that man has no more gentle blood than I have. He is a No-man’s son, a Pict from Galloway, who came down with a pirate crew, and has made himself the master of this drunken old prince, and the darling of all his housecarles, and now will needs be his son-in-law whether he will or not.’

‘I thought as much,’ said Hereward; ‘but how didst thou find out this?’

‘I went out and sat with the knaves and the maids, and listened to their harp-playing (and harp they can, these Cornish, like very elves); and then I too sang songs and told them stories, for I can talk their tongue somewhat, till they all blest me for a right good fellow. And then I fell to praising up Ironhook to the women.’

‘Praising him up, man?’

‘Ay, just because I suspected him; for the women are so contrary that if you speak evil of a man they will surely speak good of him; but if you will only speak good of him, then you will hear all the evil of him he ever has done, and more besides. And this I heard; that the king’s daughter cannot abide him, and would as lief marry a seal.’

‘One did not need to be told that,’ said Hereward, ‘as long as one has eyes in one’s head. I will kill the fellow and carry her off, ere four-and-twenty hours be past.’

As they went in to the morning meal they met Alef. He was in high good humour with Hereward, and all the more so when Hereward told him his name, and how he was the son of Leofric.

‘I will warrant you are,’ he said, ‘by the gray head you carry on green shoulders. No discreeter man, they say, in these isles than the old earl.’

‘You speak truth, sir,’ said Hereward, ‘though he be no father of mine now, for of Leofric it is said in King Edward’s court, that if a man ask counsel of him, it is as though he had asked it of the oracles of God.’

'Then you are his true son, young man. I saw how you kept the peace with Ironhook, and I owe you thanks for it; for though he is my good friend, and will be my son-in-law ere long, yet a quarrel with him is more than I can abide just now, and I should not like to have seen my guest and my kinsman slain in my house.'

Hereward would have said that he thought there was no fear of that—but he prudently held his tongue, and having an end to gain, listened instead of talking.

'Twenty years ago, of course, I could have thrashed him as easily as—but now I am getting old and shaky, and the man has been a great help in need; six kings of these parts has he killed for me, who drove off my cattle, and stopped my tin works, and plundered my monks' cells too, which is worse, while I was away sailing the seas; and he is a right good fellow at heart, though he be a little rough. So be friends with him as long as you stay here, and if I can do you a service I will.'

They went in to their morning meal, at which Hereward resolved to keep the peace which he longed to break, and therefore, as was to be expected, broke.

For during the meal the fair lady, with no worse intention perhaps than that of teasing her tyrant, fell to open praises of Hereward's fair face and golden hair, and being insulted therefore by the Ironhook, retaliated by observations about his personal appearance, which were more common in the eleventh century than they happily are now. He, to comfort himself, drank deep of the French wine which had just been brought and broached, and then went out into the courtyard, where in the midst of his admiring fellow-ruffians he enacted a scene as ludicrous as it was pitiable. All the childish vanity of the savage boiled over. He strutted, he shouted, he tossed about his huge limbs, he called for a harper, and challenged all around to dance, sing, leap, fight, do anything against him; meeting with nothing but admiring silence, he danced himself out of breath, and then began boasting once more of his fights, his cruelties, his butcheries, his

impossible escapes and victories, till at last, as luck would have it, he espied Hereward, and poured out a stream of abuse against Englishmen and English courage.

'Englishmen,' he said, 'were nought. Had he not slain three of them himself with one blow?'

'Of your mouth, I suppose,' quoth Hereward, who saw that the quarrel must come, and was glad to have it done and over.

'Of my mouth?' roared Ironhook, 'of my sword, man!'

'Of your mouth,' said Hereward. 'Of your brain were they begotten, of the breath of your mouth they were born, and by the breath of your mouth you can slay them again as often as you choose.'

'Were it not that my lord Alef was here,' shouted Ironhook, 'I would kill you out of hand.'

'Promise to fight fair, and do your worst. The more fairly you fight, the more honour you will win,' said Hereward.

Whereupon the two were parted for the while

*Visage* Face.

*Compass them* Master, or surmount them.

*Elves* Fannies.

*Pict from Galloway* A Celt from the south-west of Scotland.

*Would as lief* Would as willingly

*Retaliated.* Returned like for like

## CHAPTER VIII

### HOW HEREWARD SLEW THE GIANT (1)

[The princess, in order to save Hereward, stole the giant's magic sword Brain-biter, and hid it before the fight began.]

Two hours afterwards Hereward, completely armed with helmet and mail shirt, sword and javelin, hurried across the great courtyard with Martin Lightfoot at his heels. The news that a battle was toward had soon spread, and

the men-at-arms were hurrying down to the fight; kept back, however, by Alef, who strode along at their head.

Alef was sorely perplexed in mind. He had taken, as all honest men did, a great liking to Hereward. Moreover, he was his kinsman and his guest. Save him he would if he could; but how to save him without mortally offending his tyrant Ironhook he could not see. At least he would exert what little power he had, and prevent, if possible, his men-at-arms from helping their darling leader against the hapless lad.

Alef's perplexity was much increased when his daughter bounded towards him, seized him by the arm, and hurried him on, showing by look and word which of the combatants she favoured, so plainly that the ruffians behind broke into scornful murmurs. They burst through the bushes. Martin Lightfoot happily heard them coming, and had just time to slip away noiselessly, like a rabbit, to the other part of the cover.

The combat seemed at the first glance to be one between a grown man and a child, so unequal was the size of the combatants. But the second look showed that the advantage was by no means with Ironhook. Stumbling to and fro with the broken shaft of a javelin sticking in his thigh, he vainly tried to seize Hereward with his long iron grapple. Hereward, bleeding, but still active and upright, broke away, and sprang round him, watching for an opportunity to strike a deadly blow. The housecarles rushed forward with yells. Alef shouted to the combatants to desist: but ere the party could reach them, Hereward's opportunity had come. Ironhook after a fruitless lunge stumbled forward. Hereward leapt aside, and spying an unguarded spot below the corslet, drove his sword deep into the giant's body, and rolled him over upon the sward. Then arose shouts of fury.

'Foul play!' cried one.

And others, taking up the cry, called out, 'Sorcery!' and 'Treason!'

Hereward stood over Ironhook as he lay writhing and foaming on the ground.

‘Killed by a boy at last!’ groaned he. ‘If I had but had my sword—my brain-biter which that witch stole from me but last night!’—and amid foul curses and bitter tears of shame his mortal spirit fled to its doom.

The housecarles rushed in on Hereward, who had enough to do to keep them at arm’s length by long sweeps of his sword.

Alef entreated, threatened, promised a fair trial if the men would give fair play: when, to complete the confusion, the princess threw herself upon the corpse, shrieking and tearing her hair; and to Hereward’s surprise and disgust, bewailed the prowess and the virtues of the dead, calling upon all present to avenge his murder.

Hereward vowed inwardly that he would never again trust woman’s fancy, or fight in woman’s quarrel. He was now nigh at his wits’ end; the housecarles had closed round him in a ring with the intention of seizing him, and however well he might defend his front, he might be crippled at any moment from behind: but in the very nick of time Martin Lightfoot burst through the crowd, set himself heel to heel with his master, and broke out, not with threats, but with a good-humoured laugh.

‘Here is a pretty coil about a red-headed brute of a Pict!’ Danes, Ostmen,’ he cried, ‘are you not ashamed to call such a fellow your lord, when you have such a true earl’s son as this to lead you if you will?’

The Ostmen in the company looked at each other. Martin Lightfoot saw that his appeal to the antipathies of race had told. He, therefore, followed it up by a string of witticisms upon the Pictish nation in general, of which the only two fit for modern ears to be set down were the two old stories, that the Picts had feet so large that they used to lie upon their backs and hold up their legs to shelter themselves from the sun; and that when killed, they could not fall down, but died as they were, all standing,



‘So that the only foul play I can see is that my master shoved the fellow over after he had stabbed him, instead of leaving him to stand upright there, till his flesh should fall off his bones.’

Hereward saw the effect of Martin’s words ; and burst out in Danish likewise, with a true Viking chant—

‘ Look at me, dread me !  
I am the Hereward,  
The watcher, the champion,  
The Berserker, the Viking,  
The land-thief, the sea-thief,  
Young summer-pirate,  
Famous land-waster,  
Slayer of witch-bears,  
Queller of Ogres,  
Fattener of ravens,  
Dairling of gray wolves,  
Wild widow-maker.  
Touch me—to wolf and  
Raven I give you.  
Ship with me boldly,  
Follow me gaily,  
Over the swan’s road,  
Over the whale’s bath,  
Far to the southward,  
Where sun and sea meet ,  
Where from the palm-boughs  
Apples of gold hang ,  
And freight there our long-snake  
With sendal and orfray,  
Dark Moorish maidens,  
And gold of Algier.’

‘Hark to the Viking ! Hark to the right earl’s son !’ shouted some of the Danes, whose blood had been stirred many a time before by such wild words, and on whom Hereward’s youth and beauty had their due effect. And so Hereward and Martin, who both refused stoutly to give up their arms, were marched back into the town, locked in a little church, and left to their meditations.

*Cover.* The concealment afforded by the bushes

*Javelin.* A sharp spear.

*Hapless.* Unfortunate.

*Grapple.* The great hook from which the giant took his nickname.

*Fruitless lunge.* A thrust which had no effect

*Sorcery.* Witchcraft ; dealing with evil spirits.

*Prowess.* Courage, valour.

*Ostmen.* Danes who had settled on the east coast of Ireland.

*Coil* Disturbance.

*Antipathies.* Feelings of dislike.

*The Hereward* Hereward means Guardian of the Army.

*Viking.* A name given to the pirates from the North of Europe.

Pronounced Vik-ing.

*The swan's road, the whale's bath.* The ocean.

*Freight.* To load.

*Long-snake.* The war-ship.

*Sendat.* Rich silk stuff.

*Orfraz.* Fringes of gold, used for church ornaments.

## CHAPTER IX

### HOW HEReward SLEW THE GIANT (2)

HEReward sat down on the pavement and cursed the princess. Martin Lightfoot took off his master's corslet, and, as well as the darkness would allow, bound up his wounds, which happily were not severe.

'Were I you,' said he at last, 'I should keep my curses till I saw the end of this adventure.'

'Has not the girl betrayed me shamefully?'

'Not she. I saw her warn you, as far as looks could do, not to quarrel with the man.'

'That was because she did not know me. Little she thought that I could——'

'Don't holloa till you are out of the wood. This is a night for praying rather than boasting'

'She cannot really love that wretch,' said Hereward, after a pause. 'Thou saw'st how she mocked him'

‘Women are strange things, and often tease most where they love most.’

‘But such a misbegotten savage.’

‘Women are strange things, say I, and with some a big fellow is a pretty fellow, be he uglier than seven Iron-hooks. Still, just because women are strange things, have patience, say I.’

Martin lay quietly across the door till the small hours, listening to every sound, till the key creaked once more in the lock. He started at the sound; and seizing the person who entered round the neck, whispered, ‘One word, and you are dead.’

‘Do not hurt me,’ answered a stifled voice; and Martin Lightfoot, to his surprise, found that he had grasped no armed man, but the slight frame of a young girl.

‘I am the princess,’ she whispered, ‘let me in.’

‘A very pretty hostage for us,’ thought Martin, and letting her go seized the key, locking the door in the inside.

‘Take me to your master,’ she cried, and Martin led her up the church wondering, but half suspecting some further trap.

‘You have a dagger in your hand,’ said he, holding her wrist.

‘I have. If I had meant to use it, it would have been used first on you. Take it if you like.’

She hurried up to Hereward, who lay sleeping quietly on the altar-steps; knelt by him, wrung his hands, called him her champion, her deliverer.

‘I am not well awake yet,’ said he coldly, ‘and do not know whether this may not be a dream, as more that I have seen and heard seems to be.’

‘It is no dream. I am true. I was always true to you. Have I not put myself in your power? Am I not come here to deliver you, my deliverer?’

‘The tears which you shed over your Ogre’s corpse seem to have dried quickly enough.’

‘Cruel! What else could I do? You heard him

accuse me to his rough followers of having stolen his sword. My life, my father's life, were not safe a moment, had I not dissembled, and done the thing I loathed. Ah!' she went on bitterly. 'You men, who rule the world and us by cruel steel, you forget that we poor women have but one weapon left wherewith to hold our own, and that is cunning; and are driven by you day after day to tell the lie which we detest.'

'Then you really stole his sword?'

'And hid it here, for your sake.' And she drew the weapon from behind the altar.

'Take it. It is yours now. It is magical. Whoever smites with it, need never smite again. Now, quick, you must be gone. But promise one thing before you go.'

'If I leave this land safe I will do it, be it what it may. Why not come with me, lady, and see it done?'

She laughed. 'Vain boy, do you think that I love you well enough for that?'

'I have won you, and why should I not keep you?' said Hereward sullenly.

'Do you not know that I am betrothed to your kinsman? And—though that you cannot know—that I love your kinsman?'

'So I have all the blows and none of the spoil.'

'Tush, you have the glory—and the sword—and the chance, if you will do my bidding, of being called by all ladies a true and gentle knight, who cared not for his own pleasure but for deeds of chivalry. Go to my betrothed—to Waterford over the sea. Take him this ring, and tell him by that token to come and claim me soon, lest he run the danger of losing me a second time, and lose me then for ever; for I am in hard case here, and were it not for my father's sake, perhaps I might dare, in spite of what men might say, to flee with you to your kinsman across the sea.'

'Trust me and come,' said Hereward, whose young blood kindled with a sudden nobleness. 'Trust me and I will treat you like my sister, like my queen. By the holy rood above I will swear to be true to you.'

Hereward and Martin Lightfoot stole out, locking the door, but leaving the key in it outside. To scramble over the old earthwork was an easy matter; and in a few minutes they were hurrying down the valley to the sea, with a fresh breeze blowing behind them from the north.

‘Did I not tell you, my lord,’ said Martin Lightfoot, ‘to keep your curses till you had seen the end of this adventure?’

They reached the ship, clambered on board without ceremony, at the risk of being taken and killed as robbers, and told their case. The merchants had not completed their cargo of tin. Hereward offered to make up their loss to them, if they would set sail at once; and they, feeling that the place would be for some time to come too hot to hold them, and being also in high delight, like honest Ostmen, with Hereward’s prowess, agreed to sail straight for Waterford, and complete their cargo there. But the tide was out. It was three full hours before the ship could float; and for three full hours they waited in fear and trembling, expecting the Cornishmen to be down upon them in a body every moment; under which wholesome fear some on board prayed fervently who had never been known to pray before.

*Misbegotten*. Ill-born, a term of reproach.

*Hostage*. One given to a foe in pledge.

*Dissembled*. Pretended.

*Chivalry*. Knighthood, gallant, honourable acts.

*Holy rood*. The cross.

## CHAPTER X

### HOW HEREWARD WENT TO WATERFORD

To King Ranald of Waterford Hereford now took his way, and told his story, as the king sat in his hall, drinking across the fire after the old Norse fashion. The fire of pine logs was in the midst of the hall, and the smoke went out through a hole in the roof. On one side was a long

bench, and in the middle of it the king's high arm-chair; right and left of him sat his kinsmen and the ladies, and his sea-captains and men of wealth. Opposite, on the other side of the fire, was another bench. In the middle of that sat his marshal, and right and left all his house-carles. There were other benches behind, on which sat more freemen, but of lesser rank.

And they were all drinking ale, which a servant poured out of a bucket into a great bull's horn, and the men handed round to each other.

Then Hereward came in, and sat down on the end of the hindermost bench, and Martin stood behind him, till one of the ladies said—

‘Who is that young stranger, who sits behind there so humbly, though he looks like an earl's son, more fit to sit here with us on the high bench?’

‘So he does,’ quoth King Ranald. ‘Come forward hither, young sir, and drink.’

And when Hereward came forward, all the ladies agreed that he must be an earl's son; for he had a great gold torc round his neck, and gold rings on his wrists; and a new scarlet coat, bound with gold braid; and scarlet stockings, cross-laced with gold braid up to the knee; and shoes trimmed with marten's fur; and a short blue silk cloak over all, trimmed with marten's fur likewise; and by his side, in a broad belt with gold studs, was the Ogre's sword Brain-biter, with its ivory hilt and velvet sheath; and all agreed that if he had but been a head taller, they had never seen a properer man.

‘Aha! such a gay young sea-cock does not come hither for nought. Drink first, man, and tell us thy business after,’ and he reached the horn to Hereward.

Hereward took it, and sang—

‘Brave Ranald I pledge,  
In good liquor, which lightens  
Long labour on oar-bench:  
Good liquor which sweetens  
The song of the scald.’

‘Thy voice is as fine as thy feathers, man. Nay, drink it all. We ourselves drink here by the peg at midday, but a stranger is welcome to fill his inside at all hours.’

Whereon Hereward finished the horn duly; and, at Ranald’s bidding, sat him down on the high settle. He did not remark that as he sat down, two handsome youths rose and stood behind him.

Hereward looked round, and saw King Ranald’s minstrel standing close to him, harp in hand. He took it from him courteously enough; put a silver penny into the minstrel’s hand; and running his fingers over the strings, rose and began.

‘Outlaw and free thief  
Landless and lawless  
Through the world fare I,  
Thoughtless of life.  
Soft is my beard, but  
Hard my Brain-biter.  
Wake, men me call, whom  
Warrior and warden  
Find ever watchful.  
Far in Northumberland  
Slew I the witch-bear,  
Cleaving his brain-pan,  
At one stroke I felled him.’

And so forth, chanting all his doughty deeds, with such a voice and spirit, joined to that musical talent for which he was afterwards so famous, till the hearts of the wild Norsemen rejoiced, and ‘Skall to the stranger! Skall to the young Viking!’ rang through the hall.

Then showing proudly the fresh wounds on his bare arms, he sang of his fight with the Cornish ogre, and his adventure with the princess. But always, though he went into the most minute details, he concealed the name both of her and of her father, while he kept his eyes steadily fixed on Ranald’s eldest son, Sigtryg, who sat at his father’s right hand.

The young man grew uneasy, red, almost angry ; till at last Hereward sung :—

‘ A gold ring she gave me  
Right royally dwarf-worked,  
To none will I pass it  
For prayer or for sword stroke,  
Save to him who can claim it  
By love and by troth plight,  
Let that hero speak  
If that hero be here.’

Young Sigtryg half started from his feet : but when Hereward smiled at him, and laid his finger on his lips, he sat down again. Hereward felt his shoulder touched from behind. One of the youths who had risen when he sat down bent over him, and whispered in his ear—

‘ Ah, Hereward, we know you. Do you not know us ? We are the twins, the sons of your sister.’

Hereward sprang up, struck the harp again, and sang—

‘ Outlaw and free thief  
My kinsfolk have left me,  
And no kinsfolk need I,  
Till kinsfolk shall need me  
My sword is my father,  
My shield is my mother,  
My ship is my sister,  
My horse is my brother ’

‘ Skall to the Viking ! ’ shouted the Danes once more ; and the old king, filling not this time the horn, but a golden goblet, bid him drain it and keep the goblet for his song.

Young Sigtryg leapt up, and took the cup to Hereward. ‘ Such a scald,’ he said, ‘ ought to have no meaner cup-bearer than a king’s son.’

Hereward drank it dry ; and then fixing his eyes meaningly on the prince, dropt the princess’ ring into the cup, and putting it back into Sigtryg’s hand, sang—



‘The beaker I reach back  
 More rich than I took it.  
 No gold will I grasp  
 Of the king’s, the ring-giver,  
 Till, by wit or by weapon,  
 I worthily win it.  
 While over the wolf’s meal  
 Wild widows are wailing.’

‘Does he refuse my gift?’ grumbled Ranald

‘He has given a fair reason,’ said the prince, as he hid the ring in his bosom; ‘leave him to me, for my brother in arms he is henceforth’

After which, as was the custom of those parts, most of them drank too much liquor. But neither Sigtryg nor Hereward drank, and the two Siwards stood behind their young uncle’s seat, watching him with that intense admiration which lads can feel for a young hero.

That night, when the warriors were asleep, Sigtryg and Hereward talked out their plans. They would equip two ships; they would fight all the kinglets of Cornwall at once, if need was; they would carry off the princess, and burn Alef’s town over his head if he said nay. Nothing could be more simple than the tactics required in an age when might was right.

*Marshal.* The officer in charge of an army.

*Freemen.* Tenants who held land from a lord, but were not his slaves.

*Scald.* A bard, or singer.

*Drink by the peg.* The wooden drinking-vessels had a row of pegs down the inside; and each man might drink as much liquor as went from one peg to the next.

*Warden.* A guardian.

*Skall.* Health.

*The twins.* Their names were Siward the White, and Siward the Red.

*Equip.* Fit out

*Kinglets.* Kings of small importance

*Tactics.* Plans of action

## CHAPTER XI

## HOW HEReward SUCCOURED THE PRINCESS AGAIN (1).

[Ranald of Waterford sent to Gweek, to claim the princess as his son's bride ; but his men, forty in number, were seized, and cast into prison ]

FAT was the feasting, and loud was the harping, in the halls of Alef, King of Gweek. Savoury was the smell of fried pilchard and hake ; more savoury still that of roast porpoise ; most savoury of all that of fifty huge squab pies, built up of layers of apples, bacon, onions, and mutton, and at the bottom of each a squab, or young cormorant, which diffused both through the pie and through the air, a delicate odour of mingled guano and polecat. And the occasion was worthy alike of the smell and of the noise, for King Alef, finding that after the Ogre's death the neighbouring kings were but too ready to make reprisals on him for his champion's murders and robberies, had made a treaty of alliance, offensive and defensive, with Hannibal, the son of Gryll, King of Marazion, and had confirmed the same by bestowing on him the hand of his fair daughter. Whether she approved of the match or not, was asked neither by King Alef nor by King Hannibal.

To-night was the bridal feast. To-morrow morning the church was to hallow the union, and after that Hannibal Grylls was to lead home his bride, among a gallant company.

And as they ate and drank, and harped and piped, there came into that hall four shabbily drest men—one of them a short, broad fellow, with black elf-locks and a red beard—and sat them down sneakingly at the very lowest end of all the benches.

In hospitable Cornwall, especially on such a day, every guest was welcome ; and the strangers sat peaceably, but ate nothing, though there was both hake and pilchard within reach.

Next to them, by chance, sat a great Dane, as honest, brave, and stupid a fellow as ever tugged at oar, and after a while they fell talking, till the strangers had heard the reason of this great feast, and all the news of the country side.

‘But whence did they come, not to know it already; for all Cornwall was talking thereof?’

‘Oh—they came out of Devonshire, seeking service down west with some merchant or rover, being seafaring men.’

The stranger with the black hair had been, meanwhile, earnestly watching the princess, who sat at the board’s head. He saw her watching him in return; and with a face sad enough.

She turned pale and red again and after a while she spoke.

‘There is a stranger there; and what his rank may be I know not: but he has been thrust down to the lowest seat, in a house that used to honour strangers, instead of treating them like slaves. Let him take this dish from my hand, and eat joyfully, lest when he goes home he may speak scorn of bridegroom and bride, and our Cornish weddings.’

The servant brought the dish down: he gave a look at the stranger’s shabby dress, turned up his nose, and pretending to mistake, put the dish into the hand of the Dane.

‘Hold, lads,’ quoth the stranger. ‘If I have ears, that was meant for me.’

He seized the platter with both hands; and therewith the hands both of the Cornishman and of the Dane. There was a struggle. but so bitter was the stranger’s gripe, that the blood burst from the nails of both his opponents.

And when the eating was over and the drinking began, the princess rose, and came round to drink the farewell health.

With her maids behind her, and her harper before her (so was the Cornish custom), she pledged one by one each

of the guests, slave as well as free, while the harper played a tune.

She came down at last to the strangers. Her face was pale, and her eyes red with weeping.

She filled a cup of wine, and one of her maids offered it to the stranger.

He put it back courteously, but firmly. 'Not from your hand,' said he.

A growl against his bad manners rose straightway; and the minstrel, who (as often happened in those days) was jester likewise, made merry at his expense, and advised the company to turn the wild beast out of the hall.

'Silence, fool!' said the princess. 'Why should he know our West-country ways? He may take it from my hand, if not from hers.'

And she held out to him the cup herself.

He took it, looking her steadily in the face; and it seemed to the minstrel as if their hands lingered together round the cup-handle, and that he saw the glitter of a ring.

Like many another of his craft before and since, he was a vain meddlesome vagabond, and must needs pry into a secret which certainly did not concern him.

So he could not leave the stranger in peace; and knowing that his privileged calling protected him from that formidable fist, he never passed him by without a sneer or a jest, as he wandered round the table, offering his harp, in the Cornish fashion, to any one who wished to play and sing.

'But not to you, Sir Elf-locks. he that is rude to a pretty girl when she offers him wine, is too great a boor to understand my trade.'

'It is a fool's trick,' answered the stranger at last, 'to put off what you must do at last. If I had but the time, I would pay you for your tune with a better one than you ever heard.'

'Take the harp, then, boor!' said the minstrel, with a laugh and a jest.

The stranger took it, and drew from it such music as made all heads turn toward him at once. Then he began to sing, sometimes by himself; and sometimes his comrades joined their voices in a Fenmen's three-man-gee.

In vain the minstrel, jealous for his own credit, tried to snatch the harp away. The stranger sang on, till all hearts were softened, and the princess, taking the rich shawl from her shoulders, threw it over those of the stranger, saying that it was a gift too poor for such a scald.

'Scald!' roared the bridegroom (now well in his cups) from the head of the table; 'ask what thou wilt, short of my bride and my kingdom, and it is thine.'

'Give me, then, Hannibal Grylls, King of Marazion, the Danes who came from Ranald of Waterford.'

'You shall have them!' Pity that you have asked for nothing better than such tarry ruffians

A few minutes after, the minstrel, bursting with jealousy and rage, was whispering in Hannibal's ear.

The hot blood flushed up in his cheeks, and his thin lips curved into a snaky smile. Perhaps treachery in his heart; for all that Hannibal was heard to reply was, 'We must not disturb the good-fellowship of a Cornish wedding.'

The stranger, nevertheless, and the princess likewise, had seen that bitter smile

*Pilchard and hake* Two kinds of fish, much caught off the Cornish coast.

*Guano* The dirt made by sea-fowls.

*Polecat.* An animal with a strong and objectionable smell.

*Reprisals.* Deeds done in revenge.

*Marazion.* A town in Cornwall.

*Elf-locks.* Wild, untidy hair.

*Privileged calling.* A minstrel was looked upon as almost sacred.

*Boor.* A rough, unpolished man.

## CHAPTER XII

## HOW HEReward SUCCOURED THE PRINCESS AGAIN (2)

IN the morning the marriage ceremony was performed, and then began the pageant of leading home the bride. The minstrels went first, harping and piping; then King Hannibal, carrying his bride behind him on a pillion; and after them a string of servants and men-at-arms, leading country ponies laden with the bride's dower. Along with them, unarmed, sulky, and suspicious, walked the forty Danes, who were informed that they should go to Marazion, and there be shipped off for Ireland.

Now, as all men know, those parts of Cornwall, flat and open furze-downs aloft, are cut, for many miles inland, by long branches of tide river, walled in by woods and rocks; and by crossing one or more of these, the bridal party would save many a mile on their road towards the west.

So they had timed their journey by the tides; lest, finding low water in the rivers, they should have to wade to the ferry-boats waist-deep in mud; and going down the steep hillside, through oak, and ash, and hazel-copse, they entered, as many as could, a great flat-bottomed barge, and were rowed across some quarter of a mile, to land under a jutting crag, and go up again by a similar path into the woods.

So the first boat-load went up, the minstrels in front, harping and piping till the greenwood rang; King Hannibal next, with his bride; and behind him spear-men and axe-men, with a Dane between every two.

When they had risen some two hundred feet, and were in the heart of the forest, Hannibal turned, and made a sign to the men behind him.

Then each pair of them seized the Dane between them, and began to bind his hands behind his back.

'What will you do with us?'

'Send you back to Ireland,—a king never breaks his

word,—but pick out your right eyes first, to show your master how much I care for him. Lucky for you that I leave you an eye apiece, to find your friend the harper, whom, if I catch, I flay alive.'

'You promised!' cried the princess.

'And so did you, traitress!' and he gripped her arm, which was round his waist, till she screamed 'So did you promise: but not to me. And you shall pass your bridal night in my dog-kennel, after my dog-whip has taught you not to give rings again to wandering harpers.'

The wretched princess shuddered; for she knew too well that such an atrocity was easy and common enough.

But the words had hardly passed the lips of Hannibal, ere he reeled in the saddle, and fell to the ground with a javelin through his heart.

A strong arm caught the princess. A voice which she knew bade her have no fear.

'Bind your horse to a tree, for we shall want him; and wait.'

Three well-armed men rushed on the nearest Cornishmen, and hewed them down. A fourth unbound the Dane, and bade him catch up a weapon and fight for his life.

A second pair were despatched, a second Dane freed, ere a minute was over; the Cornishmen, struggling up the narrow path toward the shouts above, were overpowered in detail by continually increasing numbers; and ere half an hour was over the whole party were freed, mounted on the ponies, and making their way over the downs toward the west.

'Noble, noble Hereward!—The Wake indeed!' said the princess, as she sat behind him on Hannibal's horse. 'I knew you from the first moment; and my nurse knew you too. Is she here? Is she safe?'

'I have taken care of that. She has done us too good service to be left here and be hanged.'

'I knew you, in spite of your hair, by your eyes.'

'Yes,' said Hereward. 'It is not every man who

carries one gray eye and one blue. The more difficult for me to go mumming when I need.'

'But how came you hither, of all places in the world?'

'When you sent your nurse to me last night, to warn me that treason was abroad, it was easy for me to ask your road to Marazion; and easier too, when I found that you would go home the very way we came, to know that I must make my stand here or nowhere.'

'The way you came? Then where are we going now?'

'Beyond Marazion, to a little cove—I cannot tell its name. There lies Sigtryg your betrothed, and three good ships of war.'

'There? Why did he not come for me himself?'

'Why? Because we knew nothing of what was toward. We meant to have sailed straight up your river to your father's town, and taken you out with a high hand. We had sworn an oath—which, as you saw, I kept—neither to eat nor drink in your house, save out of your own hands. But the easterly wind would not let us round the Lizard; so we put into that cove, and there I and these two lads, my nephews, offered to go forward as spies, while Sigtryg threw up an earthwork, and made a stand against the Cornish. We meant merely to go back to him, and give him news. But when I found you as good as wedded, I had to do what I could, while I could, and I have done it, like a Wake as I am.'

'You have, my noble and true champion,' said she, kissing him.

'Humph!' quoth Hereward, laughing. 'Do not tempt me by being too grateful. It is hard enough to gather honey, like the bees, for other folks to eat. What if I kept you myself, now I have got you?'

'Hereward?'

'Oh, there is no fear, pretty lady. I have other things to wake over than making love to you—and one is, how we are to get to our ships, and, moreover, past Marazion town.'



And hard work they had to get thither. The county was soon roused and up in arms; and it was only by wandering a three days' circuit, through bogs and moors, till the ponies were utterly tired out, and left behind (the bulkier part of the dowry being left with them), that they made their appearance on the shore of Mount's Bay, Hereward leading the princess in triumph upon Hannibal's horse.

*Pageant* A procession.

*Pillion*. A saddle upon which a man and woman can ride together

*Dower*. The money and property given to a bride by her parents

*Flay*. To strip off the skin.

*Atrocity* Detestable cruelty or wickedness.

*Mumming*. To go about disguised, or playing a part.

*Cove*. An inlet on the coast.

## CHAPTER XIII

### HOW HEREWARD WAS WRECKED UPON THE FLANDERS SHORE

A GREAT home-sickness had seized Hereward. He would go back and see the old house, and the cattle pastures, and the meres and fens of his boyhood.

So Hereward asked Ranald for ships, and got at once two good vessels, as payment for his doughty deeds.

One he christened the *Garpike*, from her narrow build and long beak, and the other the *Otter*, because, he said, whatever she grappled she would never let go till she heard the bones crack. They were excellent new 'vessels,' nearly eighty feet long each; with double banks for twelve oars a side in the waist, which was open, save a fighting gangway along the sides; with high poop and forecastle decks; and with one large sail apiece, embroidered by Sigtryg's princess and the other ladies with a huge white bear, which Hereward had chosen as his ensign.

But, as it befell, the voyage did not prosper. They were followed by a whale, which they made sure was a witch-whale, and boded more ill luck, and accordingly they were struck by a storm in the Pentland Firth, and the poor *Gurpikie* went on shore on Hoy, and was left there for ever and a day, her crew being hardly saved, and very little of her cargo.

At last, after many days, their strength was all but worn out. They had long since given over rowing, and contented themselves with running under a close-reefed canvas whithersoever the storm should choose. At night a sea broke over them, and would have swamped the *Otter*, had she not been the best of sea-boats. But she only rolled the lee shields into the water and out again, shook herself, and went on. Nevertheless, there were three men on the poop when the sea came in, who were not there when it went out.

Wet and wild dawned that morning, showing naught but gray sea and gray air.

All of a sudden, as is the wont of gales at dawn, the clouds rose, tore up into ribands, and with a fierce black shower or two, blew clean away, disclosing a bright blue sky, a green rolling sea, and a few miles off to leeward a pale yellow line, seen only as they topped a wave, but seen only too well. To keep the ship off shore was impossible, and as they drifted nearer and nearer, the line of sand-hills rose, uglier and more formidable, through the gray spray of the surf.

Already they had been seen from the beach. The country folk, who were prowling about the shore after the waifs of the storm, crowded to meet them.

‘Axemen and bowmen, put on your harness, and be ready; but neither strike nor shoot till I give the word. We must land peaceably if we can; if not, we will die fighting.’

So said Hereward, and took the rudder into his own hand. ‘Now then,’ as she rushed into the breakers, ‘pull together, rowers all, and with a will.’

The men yelled, and sprang from the thwarts as they

tugged at the oars. The sea boiled past them, surged into the waist, blinded them with spray. The *Otter* grazed the sand once, twice, thrice, leaping forward gallantly each time; and then, pressed by a huge wave, drove high and dry upon the beach, as the oars snapt right and left, and the men tumbled over each other in heaps.

The peasants swarmed down like flies to a carcase. but they recoiled as there rose over the forecastle bulwarks, not the broad hats of peaceful buscarles, but peaked helmets, round red shields, and glittering axes.

At this moment a mounted party came down between the sand-hills: it might be, some twenty strong. Before them rode a boy on a jennet, and by him a clerk, as he seemed, upon a mule. They stopped to talk with the peasants, and then to consult among themselves.

Suddenly the boy turned from his party; and galloping down the shore, while the clerk called after him in vain, reined up his horse fetlock deep in water, within ten yards of the ship's bows.

'Yield yourselves!' he shouted in French, as he brandished a hunting spear. 'Yield yourselves, or die!'

Hereward looked at him smiling, as he sat there, keeping the head of his frightened horse toward the ship with hand and heel, his long locks streaming in the wind, his face full of courage and command, and of honesty and sweetness withal, and thought that he had never seen so fair a lad.

'And who art thou, thou pretty bold boy?' asked Hereward in French.

'I,' said he, haughtily enough, 'am Arnoul, grandson and heir of Baldwin, Marquis of Flanders, and lord of this land. And to his grace I call on you to surrender yourselves.'

Hereward looked, not only with interest, but respect, upon the grandson of one of the most famous and prosperous of northern potentates, the descendant of the mighty Charlemagne himself. He turned and told the men who the boy was

‘It would be a good trick,’ quoth one, ‘to catch that young whelp, and keep him as a hostage.’

‘Here is what will have him on board before he can turn,’ said another, as he made a running-noose in a rope.

‘Quiet, men! Am I master in this ship, or you?’

Hereward saluted the lad courteously. ‘Verily the blood of Baldwin has not degenerated. I am happy to behold so noble a son, of so noble a race.’

‘And who are you, who speak French so well, and yet by your dress are neither French nor Fleming?’

‘I am Harold Naemansson, the Viking; and these my men.’

‘You are Vikings?’ cried the boy, pressing his horse into the foam so eagerly, that the men mistaking his intent, had to be repressed again by Hereward. ‘You are Vikings! Then come on shore, and welcome. You shall be my friends. You shall be my brothers. I will answer to my grandfather. I have longed to see Vikings. I long to be a Viking myself.’

‘By the hammer of Thor,’ cried the old master, ‘and thou wouldst make a bonny one, my lad.’

But the boy rode back to his companions, and talked and gesticulated eagerly.

Then the clerk rode down, and talked with Hereward.

‘Are you Christians?’ shouted he, before he would adventure himself near the ship.

‘Christians we are, sir clerk, and dare do no harm to a man of God.’

The clerk rode nearer; his handsome palfrey, furry cloak, rich gloves and boots, moreover his air of command, showed that he was no common man.

‘I,’ said he, ‘am the abbot of St. Bertin, and tutor of yonder prince. I can bring down, at a word, against you, the chatelain of St. Omer with all his knights, beside knights and men-at-arms of my own. But I am a man of peace, and not of war; and would have no blood shed if I can help it.’

‘Then make peace,’ said Hereward. ‘Your lord may

kill us if he will, or have us for his guests if he will. If he does the first, we shall kill, each of us, a few of his men before we die ; if the latter, we shall kill a few of his foes. If you be a man of God, you will counsel him accordingly.'

The abbot rode out of the water faster than he had ridden in ; and a fresh consultation ensued, after which the boy, with a warning gesture to his companions, turned and galloped away through the sand-hills.

'He is gone to his grandfather himself, I verily believe,' quoth Hereward.

*Garpike.* A long-bodied fish, whose jaws are prolonged into a slender beak, armed with teeth.

*Poop.* The stern of a vessel.

*Ensign.* A flag.

*Boded.* Foretold.

*Hoy.* An island off the north coast of Scotland.

*Lee.* The side opposite to the wind

*Warfs.* Things without an owner.

*Harness.* Armour.

*Buscarles* Seamen or mariners

*Jennet.* A small Spanish horse.

*Clerk* A person in holy orders

*Baldwin of Flanders.* Reigned from 1036 to 1067. His wife was Adela, a princess of France ; and their daughter was Matilda, who married William the Conqueror.

*Charlemagne.* The famous hero of the Middle Ages. He was born about 742, and became King of the Franks, a powerful German tribe, in 771. He spread the territories of the Frankish kingdom to an enormous extent ; and entering into an alliance with the Pope, revived the ancient Roman Empire of the West, which had been in the hands of barbarians for more than three centuries. He was crowned Emperor at Rome in 800, and died 814.

*Whelp.* A young animal

*Naemansson.* No Man's Son.

*Ransom.* Money paid for the deliverance of a hostage.

*Thor.* The chief god of the Northmen.

*Gesticulated.* Moved his hands and arms freely

*Chatelain.* The keeper or constable of a fortress.

*St. Bertin.* A famous abbey in the town of St. Omer.

*St. Omer.* A strong town and fortress, 177 miles north of Paris.

## CHAPTER XIV

## HOW HEReward STAYED AT THE ABBEY

THEY waited for some two hours, unmolested ; and shifted and dried themselves as well as they could ; ate what provisions were unspoilt by the salt water, and, broaching the last barrel of ale, drank healths to each other and to the Flemings on shore.

At last down rode with the boy a noble-looking man, and behind him knights and men-at-arms. He announced himself as the chatelain of St. Omer, and repeated the demand to surrender.

‘There is no need for it,’ said Hereward. ‘We are already that young prince’s guests. He has said that we shall be his friends and brothers. He has said that he will answer to his grandfather, the great marquis, whom I and mine shall be proud to serve. I claim the word of a descendant of Charlemagne.’

So promises were given all round ; and Hereward explained the matter to the men, without whose advice (for they were all as free as himself) he could not act.

‘Needs must,’ grunted they, as they packed up each his little valuables.

Then Hereward sheathed his sword, and leaping from the bow, came up to the boy.

‘Put your hands between his, fair sir,’ said the chatelain

‘That is not the manner of Vikings.’

And he took the boy’s right hand, and grasped it in the plain English fashion.

‘There is the hand of an honest man. Come down, men, if you be wise ; and take this young lord’s hand, and serve him in the wars ; as I shall do.’

One by one the men came down, and each took Arnoul’s hand, and shook it till the lad’s face grew red.

But none of them bowed, or made obeisance. They looked the boy full in the face, and as they stepped back, stared round upon the ring of armed men with a smile and something of a swagger.

'These are they who bow to no man, and call no man master,' whispered the abbot.

And so they were: and so are their descendants of Scotland and Northumbria unto this very day.

The boy sprang from his horse, and walked among them and round them in delight. He admired and handled their double axes; their short sea-bows of horn and deer-sinew; their red Danish coats, their black sea-cloaks, fastened on the shoulder with rich brooches; and the gold and silver bracelets on their wrists. He wondered at their long shaggy beards, and still more at the blue patterns with which the English among them, Hereward especially, were tattooed on throat, and arm, and knee.

'Yes, you are Vikings—just such as my uncle Robert tells me of.'

Hereward knew well the exploits of Robert the Frisian in Spain and Greece. 'I trust that your noble uncle,' he asked, 'is well? He was one of us poor sea-cocks, and sailed the swan's path gallantly, till he became a mighty prince. Here is a man here who was with your noble uncle in Spain.'

And he thrust forward the old master.

The boy's delight knew no bounds.

Then he rode back to the ship, and round and round her (for the tide by that time had left her high and dry), and wondered at her long snake-like lines, and carven stem and stern.

'Tell me about this ship. Let me go on board of her. I have never seen a ship inland at Mons there, and even here there are only heavy ugly busses, and little fishing-boats. No. You must be all hungry and tired. We will go to St Bertin at once, and you shall be feasted royally. Harken, villains!' shouted he to the peasants. 'This ship belongs to the fair sir here—my guest and friend,

and if any man dares to steal from her a stave or a nail I will have his thief's hand cut off.'

'The ship, fair lord,' said Hereward, 'is yours, not mine. You should build twenty more after her pattern, and man them with such lads as these, as did your noble uncle before you.'

And so they marched inland, after the boy had dismounted one of his men, and put Hereward on the horse

'You gentlemen of the sea can ride as well as sail,' said the chatelain, as he remarked with some surprise Hereward's perfect seat and hand.

'We should soon learn to fly likewise,' laughed Hereward, 'if there were any booty to be picked up in the clouds there overhead'; and he rode on by Arnoul's side, as the lad questioned him about the sea, and nothing else

'Ah, my fair boy,' said Hereward at last, 'look there, and let those be Vikings who must'

And he pointed to the rich pastures, broken by strips of cornland and snug farms, which stretched between the sea and the great forest of Flanders

'What do you mean?'

But Hereward was silent. It was so like his own native fens. For a moment there came over him the longing for a home.

So he was silent and sad withal.

'What does he mean?' asked the boy of the abbot

'He seems a wise man: let him answer for himself.'

The boy asked once more.

'Lad! lad!' said Hereward, waking as from a dream. 'If you be heir to such a fair land as that, thank God there; and pray to Him that you may rule it justly, and keep it in peace, as they say your grandfather and your father do. and leave glory, and fame, and the Vikings' bloody trade, to those who have neither father nor mother, wife nor land, but live like the wolf of the wood, from one meal to the next.'

'I thank you for those words, Sieur Heraud,' said the good abbot, while the boy went on abashed, and Hereward





And so they marched onward, after the boy had dismounted one of his men, and put Hereward on the horse — Page 61

himself was startled at his own saying, and rode silent till they crossed the drawbridge of St. Bertin, and entered that ancient fortress, so strong that it was the hiding-place in war time for all the treasures of the country.

The pirates entered, not without gloomy distrust, the gates of that consecrated fortress; while the monks in their turn were (and with some reason) considerably frightened when they were asked to entertain as guests forty Norse rovers.

However, there was no refusing the grandson and heir of Count Baldwin; and the hearts of the monks were comforted by hearing that Hereward was a good Christian, and that most of his crew had been at least baptized. The abbot therefore took courage, and admitted them into the hospice, with solemn warnings as to the doom which they might expect if they took the value of a horse-nail from the patrimony of the blessed saint.

After which Hereward stayed quietly in the abbey certain days; and young Arnoul, in spite of all remonstrances from the abbot, would never leave his side till he had heard from him and from his men as much of their adventures as they thought it prudent to relate.

*Obersance.* A gesture of courtesy.

*Sieur.* Lord.

*Robert the Frisian.* The second son of Baldwin the Great; reigned himself as Count of Flanders from 1072 to 1092.

*Herard* Hereward's name as pronounced by the abbot.

*Abashed.* Silent and confused.

*Consecrated.* Dedicated to God

*Mons.* A city of Flanders.

*Hospice.* A house for guests.

*Busse.* Small vessels.

*Patrimony.* Property.

*Stalwart.* Big and strong.

## CHAPTER XV

### HOW HEReward WENT TO THE WAR AT GUISNES

THERE were few potentates of the north more feared and respected than Baldwin, the good-natured Earl of Flanders.

But at the moment of Hereward's arrival he was troubled with the Count of Guisnes, who would not pay him up certain dues, and otherwise acknowledge his sovereignty.

Therefore when the chatelain of St. Omer sent him word to Bruges that a strange Viking had landed with his crew, calling himself Harold Naemansson, and offering to take service with him, he returned for answer that the said Harold might make proof of his faith and prowess upon the said count, in which, if he acquitted himself like a good knight, Baldwin would have further dealings with him.

So the chatelain of St. Omer, with all his knights and men-at-arms, and Hereward with his sea-cocks, marched north-west up to Guisnes, with little Arnoul cantering alongside in high glee, for it was the first war he had ever seen.

And they came to the castle of Guisnes, and summoned the count, by trumpet and herald, to pay or fight.

Whereon, the count preferring the latter, certain knights of his came forth and challenged the knights of St. Omer to fight them man to man. Whereon, there was the usual splintering of lances and slipping up of horses, and hewing at heads and shoulders so well defended in mail that no one was much hurt. The archers and arbalisters, meanwhile, amused themselves by shooting at the castle walls, out of which they chipped several small pieces of stone. And when they were all tired they drew off on both sides, and went in to dinner.

At which Hereward's men, who were accustomed to a more serious fashion of fighting, stood by, mightily amused, and vowing it was as pretty a play as ever they saw in their lives.

The next day the same comedy was repeated.

'Let me go in against those knights, sir chatelain,' asked Hereward, who felt the lust of battle tingling in him from head to heel, 'and try if I cannot do somewhat towards deciding all this. If we fight no faster than we did yesterday our beards will be grown down to our knees before we take Guisnes.'

'Let my Viking go!' cried Arnoul. 'Let me see him fight!' as if he had been a pet game-cock or bull-dog.

'You can break a lance, fine sir, if it please you,' said the chatelain.

'I break more than lances,' quoth Hereward as he cantered off.

'You,' said he to his men, 'draw round hither to the left; and when I drive the Frenchmen to the right, make a run for it, and get between them and the castle gate; and we will try the Danish axe against their horses' legs.'

Then Hereward spurred his horse, shouting 'A Wake! A Wake!' and dashed into the press; and therein did mightily, till he saw lie on the ground, close to the castle gate, one of the chatelain's knights with four Guisnes knights around him. At them he rode, and slew them every one, and mounted the wounded Fleming on his own horse and led him across the field, though the archers shot sore at him from the wall. And when the press rode at him, his Danish men got between them and the castle, and made a stand to cover him. Then the Guisnes knights rode at them scornfully, crying—

'What footpad-churls have we here, who fancy they can face horsed knights?'

But they did not know the stuff of the Danish men; who all shouted 'A Wake! A Wake!' and turned the lances' points with their targets, and hewed off the horses' heads, and would have hewed off the riders' likewise, had not Hereward bidden them give quarter, according to the civilised fashion of France and Flanders. Whereon all the knights who were not taken rode right and left, and let them pass through in peace, with several prisoners, and him whom Hereward had rescued.

At which little Arnoul was as proud as if he had done it himself, and the chatelain sent word to Baldwin that the newcomer was of no common merit; while the heart of the Count of Guisnes became as water; and his knights, both those who were captives and those who were not, complained indignantly of the unchivalrous trick of the

Danes. How villainous for men on foot, not only to face knights, but to bring them down to their own standing ground by basely cutting off their horses' heads!

To which Hereward answered, that he knew the rules of chivalry as well as any of them. but he was hired, not to joust at a tournament, but to make the Count of Guisnes pay his lord Baldwin, and make him pay he would.

The next day he bade his men sit still and look on, and leave him to himself. And singling out the burliest and boldest knight whom he saw, he rode up to him lance point in air, and courteously asked him to come and be killed in fair fight. The knight, seeing that Hereward was by no means a large or a heavy man, replied as courteously, that he should have great pleasure in trying to kill Hereward. On which they rode some hundred yards out of the press, calling out that they were to be left alone by both sides, for it was an honourable duel; and, turning their horses, charged.

After which act they found themselves and their horses all four in a row, sitting on their hind-quarters on the ground, amid the fragments of their lances.

'Well ridden' shouted they both at once, as they leaped up laughing, and drew their swords.

After which they hammered away at each other merrily. The sparks flew; the iron rang; and all men stood still to see that gallant fight.

So they watched and cheered, till Hereward struck his man such a blow under the ear, that he dropped, and lay like a log.

'I think I can carry you,' quoth Hereward, and picking him up, he threw him over his shoulder, and walked towards his men.

'Bear and bullock' shouted they in delight, laughing at the likeness between Hereward's attitude and that of a bear waddling off on his hind legs with his prey in his arms.

'He should have killed his bullock outright before he went to carry him. Look there!'

And the knight, awakening from his swoon, struggled violently to escape.

But Hereward, though the smaller, was the stronger man; and crushing him in his arms, walked on steadily.

'Knights to the rescue! Hoibricht is taken!' shouted they of Guisnes, galloping towards him.

'A Wake! A Wake! To me Vikings all!' shouted Hereward. And the Danes leapt up, and ran towards him, axe in hand.

The chatelain's knights rode up likewise; and so it befell that Hereward carried his prisoner safe into camp.

'And who are you, gallant knight?' asked he of his prisoner.

'Hoibricht, nephew of Eustace, Count of Guisnes.'

'So I suppose you will be ransomed. Till then—— Armourer!'

And the hapless Hoibricht found himself chained and fettered, and sent off to Hereward's tent, under the custody of Martin Lightfoot.

The next day, the Count of Guisnes, stupefied with grief at the loss of his nephew, sent the due honour and service to his prince, besides gifts and hostages.

And so ended the troubles of Baldwin and Eustace of Guisnes.

*Potentate* A great prince.

*Guisnes*. A town 57 miles south of Calais.

*Bruges*. An ancient and beautiful city of Flanders

*Prowess*. Courage.

*Arbalisters* Bowmen or archers.

*Lust of battle*. A longing to take part in the fight.

*A Wake! A Wake!* Every warrior adopted some war-cry to shout on going into battle. Hereward takes his own nickname.

*Press*. The crowd

*Footpad churls*. A footpad is a robber who goes about on foot. A churl is a man of low birth.

*Give quarter*. To show mercy; to spare their lives.

*Joust*. A tilting match or tournament

*Hoibricht*. The name of the vanquished knight.

## CHAPTER XVI

HOW A FAIR LADY EXERCISED THE MECHANICAL ART  
TO WIN HERWARD'S LOVE

IN an upper room of her mother's house in St. Omer sat the fair Torfrida, alternately looking out of the window and at a book of mechanics. In the garden outside, the wryneck (as it is his fashion in May) was calling Pi-pi-pi among the gooseberry bushes, till the cob-walls rang again. In the book was a Latin recipe for drying the poor wryneck, and using him as a philtre which should compel the love of any person desired. Mechanics, it must be understood, in those days were considered as identical with mathematics, and those again with astrology and magic.

Torfrida had had peculiar opportunities of learning mechanics. The fairest and richest damsel in St. Omer, she had been left early by her father an orphan, to the care of a superstitious mother, and of a learned uncle, the Abbot of St. Bertin. Torfrida's nurse, moreover, was a Lapp woman, carried off in some pirating foray, and skilled in all the sorceries for which the Lapps were famed throughout the North. Her uncle, partly from good-nature, partly from a pious hope that she might enter religion, and leave her wealth to the Church, had made her his pupil, and taught her the mysteries of books; and she had proved to be a strangely apt scholar. Grammar, rhetoric, Latin prose and poetry, such as were taught in those days, she mastered ere she was grown up. Then she fell upon romance; and Charlemagne and his Paladins, the heroes of Troy, Alexander and his generals, peopled her imagination.

So Torfrida beguiled her lonely life in that dull town, looking out over dreary flats and muddy dykes, by a whole dream-world of fantastic imaginations, and was ripe and ready for any wild deed which her wild brain might suggest.

Pure she was all the while, generous, and noble-hearted; with a deep and sincere longing—as one soul in ten

thousand has—after knowledge for its own sake; but ambitious exceedingly. She laughed to scorn the notion of a nunnery, and laughed to scorn equally the notion of marrying any knight whom she had yet seen. Her uncle and Marquis Baldwin could have between them compelled her, as an orphan heiress, to marry whom they liked. But Torfrida had as yet managed both the abbot and the marquis successfully. Lances had been splintered, helmets split, and more than one life lost in her honour; but she had only, as the best safeguard she could devise, given some hint of encouragement to one Ascelm, a tall knight of St. Valeri, the most renowned and courtly bully of those parts, by bestowing on him a scrap of ribbon, and bidding him keep it against all comers. By this means she insured the personal chastisement of all other youths who dared to lift their eyes to her, while she by no means bound herself. The method was rough; but so was the time, and what better could a poor lady do in days when no man's life, or woman's honour, was safe, unless (as too many were forced to do) she retired into a cloister, and got from the Church that peace which this world certainly could not give, and, happily, dared not take away?

The arrival of Hereward and his men had, of course, stirred the great current of her life, and, indeed, that of St. Omer, usually as stagnant as the dykes, round its wall. Who the unknown champion was (for his name of Naemansson showed that he was concealing something at least)—whence he had come, and what had been his previous exploits, busied all the gossips of the town. Would he and his men rise and plunder the abbey? Was not the chatelain mad in leaving young Arnoul with him all day? Maddier still, in taking him out to battle against the Count of Guisnes? He might be a spy of some great invading force. He was come to spy out the nakedness of the land, and would shortly vanish, to return with Harold Hardraade of Norway, or Sweyn of Denmark, and all their hosts. Nay, was he not Harold Hardraade himself in disguise? And so forth. All which Torfrida heard,



and thought within herself that, be he who he might, she should like to look on him again.

Then came the news how, the very first day that he had gone out against the Count of Guisnes, he had gallantly rescued a wounded man. A day or two after came fresh news of some doughty deed, and then another and another. And when Hereward returned, after a week's victorious fighting, all St. Omer was in the street to stare at him.

Then Torfrida heard enough, and, had it been possible, more than enough, of Hereward and his prowess.

And when they came riding in, the great marquis at the head of them all, with Robert the Frisian on one side of him, and on the other Hereward, as fresh as flowers in May, Torfrida looked down on him out of her little lattice in the gable, and loved him, once and for all, with all her heart and soul.

And Hereward looked up at her and her dark blue eyes and dark raven locks; and thought her the fairest thing that he had ever seen, and asked who she might be, and heard; and as he heard, he forgot all about the other pretty birds which were still in the bush about the wide world: and thought for many a day of nought but the pretty bird which he held (so conceited was he of his own powers of winning her) there safe in hand in St. Omer.

So he cast about to see her, and to win her love. And she cast about to see him, and to win his love. But neither saw the other for awhile; and it might have been better for one of them had they never seen each other again.

If Torfrida could have foreseen, and foreseen, and foreseen:—why, if she were true woman, she would have done exactly what she did, and taken the bitter with the sweet, the unknown with the known, as we all must do in life, unless we wish to live and die alone.

*Wryneck.* A small bird like a woodpecker.

*Cob-walls.* Walls made of clay and straw, well beaten together.

*Recipe.* A medical prescription

*Philtre.* A potion or charm.

*Astrology.* A science which professed to read fortunes by the stars

*Lapp* A native of Lapland.

*Rhetoric.* The science of oratory or speaking.

*Paladins.* The twelve knights of Charlemagne.

*Troy.* A city in Asia Minor, besieged by the Greeks for ten years

*Alexander* King of Macedonia and conqueror of Greece. Died 323 B.C.

*St Valeri.* On the north coast of France.

*Harold Harefoot* A famous king of Norway, who, with Tostig Godwinsson, invaded England in 1066. They sailed up the Humber, and took York; but were defeated at Stamford Bridge, and were both slain.

*Sweyn.* King of Denmark, a nephew of Canute.

*Lattice.* A small window with cross-bars.

## CHAPTER XVII

### HOW HEREWARD WON THE MAGIC ARMOUR

[Soon after, a great tournament was held at Poitiers, in France, to which Hereward and many other gallant knights went. They were absent from St. Omer for some days, and Torfrida was weary at waiting for news.]

At last news came.

Torfrida was sitting over her books; her mother, as usual, was praying in the churches, when the old Lapp nurse came in. A knight was at the door. He said his name was Siward the White, and he came from Hereward.

From Hereward! He was at least alive, he might be wounded, though; and she rushed out of the chamber into the hall, looking more beautiful than ever; her colour heightened by the quick beating of her heart; her dark hair, worn loose and long, after the fashion of those days, streaming around her and behind her.

A handsome young man stood in the doorway, armed from head to foot.

'You are Siward, Hereward's nephew?'

He bowed assent. She took him by the hands, and, after the fashion of those days, kissed him on the small

space on either cheek which was left bare between the nose-piece and the chain-mail.

‘You are welcome. Hereward is—alive?’

‘Alive and gay, and all the more gay at being able to send to the Lady Torfrida by me something which was once hers, and now is hers once more.’

And he drew from his bosom the ribbon of the knight of St. Valeri.

She almost snatched it from his hand, in her delight at recovering her favour.

‘How—where—did he get this?’

‘He saw it, in the thick of the tournament, on the helm of a knight who, he knew, had vowed to maim him or take his life; and, wishing to give him a chance of fulfilling his vow, rode him down, horse and man. The knight’s French friends attacked us in force, and we Flemings, with Hereward at our head, beat them off, and overthrew so many, that we are almost all horsed at the Frenchmen’s expense. Three more knights, with their horses, fell before Hereward’s lance.’

‘And what of this favour?’

‘He sends it to its owner. Let her say what shall be done with it.’

Torfrida was on the point of saying, ‘He has won it, let him wear it for my sake.’ But she paused. She longed to see Hereward face to face; to speak to him, if but one word. If she allowed him to wear the favour, she must at least have the pleasure of giving it with her own hands. And she paused.

‘And he is killed?’

‘Who? Hereward?’

‘Sir Ascelin.’

‘Only bruised; but he shall be killed, if you will

‘God forbid!’

‘Then,’ said the knight, mistaking her meaning, ‘all I have to tell Hereward is, it seems, that he has wasted his blow. He will return, therefore, to the knight of St. Valeri his horse, and, if the Lady Torfrida chooses, the

favour which he has taken by mistake from its rightful owner.' And he set his teeth, and could not prevent stamping on the ground, in evident passion. There was a tone, too, of deep disappointment in his voice, which made Torfrida look keenly at him. Why should Hereward's nephew feel so deeply about that favour? And as she looked—could that man be the youth Siward? Young he was, but surely thirty years old at least. His face could hardly be seen, hidden by helmet and nose-piece above, and mailed up to the mouth below. But his long moustache was that of a grown man; his vast breadth of shoulder, his hard hand, his sturdy limbs—these surely belonged not to the slim youth whom she had seen from her lattice riding at Hereward's side. And as she looked, she saw upon his hand the bear of which her nurse had told her.

'You are deceiving me!' and she turned first deadly pale, and then crimson. 'You—you are Hereward himself!'

'I? Pardon me, my lady. Ten minutes ago I should have been glad enough to have been Hereward. Now I am thankful enough that I am only Siward; and not Hereward, who wins for himself contempt by overthrowing a knight more fortunate than he.' And he bowed, and turned away to go.

'Hereward! Hereward!' and in her passion she seized him by both his hands. 'I know you! I know that device upon your hand. At last! at last! My hero, my Paladin! How I have longed for this moment! How I have toiled for it, and not in vain! Alas, alas!—what am I saying?' And she tried, in her turn, to escape from Hereward's mailed arms.

'Then you do not care for that man?'

'For him? Here, take my favour, wear it before all the world, and guard it as you only can; and let all know that Torfrida is your love.'

And with hands trembling with passion she bound the ribbon round his helm.

'Yes! I am Hereward,' he almost shouted; 'the Berserker, the brain-hewer, the land-thief, the sea-thief, the feeder of wolf and raven—Aoi! Ere my beard was grown, I was a match for giants. How much more now that I am a man whom ladies love? Many a champion has quailed before my very glance. How much more now that I wear Torfrida's gift? Aoi!'

Torfrida had often heard that wild battle-cry of Aoi! But she shuddered as she heard it close to her ears; and saw, from the flashing eye and dilated nostril, the temper of the man on whom she had thrown herself so utterly. She laid her hand upon his lips.

'Silence' silence for pity's sake. Remember that you are in a maiden's house; and think of her good fame.'

She motioned him to go up the narrow stairs, or rather ladder, which led to the upper floor, and then led him into her chamber.

A lady's chamber was then, in days when privacy was little cared for, her usual reception room; and the bed, which stood in an alcove, served as a common seat for her and her guests. But Torfrida did not ask him to sit down. She led the way onward towards a door beyond.

Hereward followed, glancing with awe at the books, parchments, and strange instruments which lay on the table and the floor.

The old Lapp nurse sat in the window, sewing busily. She looked up, and smiled meaningly. But as she saw Torfrida unlock the farther door with one of the keys which hung at her girdle, she croaked out

'Too fast' Too fast! Trust lightly, and repent heavily.'

'Trust at once, or trust never,' said Torfrida, as she opened the door.

Hereward saw within rich dresses hung on perches round the wall, and chests barred and padlocked.

'These are treasures,' said she, 'which many a knight and nobleman has coveted. By cunning, by flattery, by threats of force even, have they tried to win what lies

here—and Torfrida herself, too, for the sake of her wealth. But thanks to the abbot, my uncle, Torfrida is still her own mistress, and mistress of the wealth which her forefathers won by sea and land far away in the East. All here is mine—and if you be but true to me, all mine is yours. Lift the lid for me, it is too heavy for my arms.'

Hereward did so; and saw within golden cups and bracelets, horns of ivory and silver, bags of coin, and among them a mail shirt and helmet, on which he fixed at once silent and greedy eyes.

She looked at his face askance, and smiled. 'Yes, these are more to Hereward's taste than gold and jewels. And he shall have them. He shall have them as a proof that if Torfrida has set her love upon a worthy knight, she is at least worthy of him; and does not demand without being able to give in return.'

And she took out the armour and held it up to him.

'This is the work of dwarfs or enchanters! This was not forged by mortal man! It must have come out of some old cavern, or dragon's hoard!' said Hereward, in astonishment at the extreme delicacy and slighthness of the mail-rings, and the richness of the gold and silver with which both hauberk and helm were inlaid.

'Enchanted it is, they say; but its maker, who can tell? My ancestor won it, and by the side of Charles Martel; and he laid a curse upon it, that whosoever of his descendants should lose that armour in fight, should die childless, without a son to wield a sword. And therefore it is that none of my ancestors, valiant as they have been, have dared to put this harness on their backs. And now, Hereward mine, dare you wear that magic armour, and face old Torfrid's curse?'

'What dare I not?'

'Think. If you lose it, in you your race must end.'

'Let it end. I accept the curse.'

And he put the armour on.

Torfrida looked at him in pride and exultation.

'It is yours—the invulnerable harness! Wear it in the forefront of the battle! And if weapon wound you through it, may I, as punishment for my lie, suffer the same upon my tender body—a wound for every wound of yours, my knight!'

*Nose-piece.* The part of the helmet which guarded the nose.

*Chain-mail.* Armour made of fine chains woven together.

*Alcove.* A recess in the wall

*Perches.* Pegs or places to hang things upon.

*Aslance.* Sideways.

*Hauberk.* A coat of mail without sleeves.

*Charles Martel* A famous king and warrior, who drove back the Saracens when they invaded France in 752

*Invulnerable.* That which cannot be wounded.

## CHAPTER XVIII

### HOW HEREWARD TURNED BERSERKER

IT befell that the great marquis sent for his son to Bruges, ere he set out for another campaign in Holland; and made him a great feast, to which he invited Torfrida and her mother.

So they went to Bruges, and Hereward and his men went with them; and they feasted, and harped, and sang; and the saying was fulfilled—

'Tis merry in the hall  
When beards wag all.'

But the only beard which wagged in that hall was Hereward's; for the Flemings, like the Normans, prided themselves on their civilised and smooth-shaven chins, and laughed (behind his back) at Hereward, who prided himself on keeping his beautiful English beard, with locks of gold which, like his long golden hair, were combed and curled daily, after the fashion of the Anglo-Danes.

After a while, Hereward's beard began to wag somewhat

too fast, as he sat by Torfrida's side. For some knight near began to tell of a wonderful mare called Swallow, which was to be found in one of the islands of the Scheldt, and was famous through all the country round; and insinuated, moreover, that Hereward might as well have brought that mare home with him as a trophy.

To which Hereward answered, in his boasting vein, that he would bring home that mare, or aught else that he had a liking to.

'You will find it not so easy. Her owner, they say, is a mighty strong churl of a horse-breeder, Dirk Hammer-hand by name; and as for cutting his throat, that you must not do; for he has been loyal to Countess Gertrude, and sent her horses whenever she needed.'

'One may pick a fair quarrel with him nevertheless.'

'Then you must bide such a buffet as you never abode before. They say his arm has seven men's strength; and whosoever visits him, he challenges to give and take a blow: but no man that has taken a blow as yet, has ever needed another.'

'Hereward will have need of his magic head-piece, if he tries that adventure,' quoth another.

'Ay,' retorted the first speaker; 'but the helmet may stand the rap well enough, and yet the brains inside be the worse.'

'Not a doubt. I knew a man once, who was so strong that he would shake a nut till the kernel went to powder, and yet never break the shell.'

'That is a lie!' quoth Hereward. And so it was, and told purposely to make him expose himself. *G. G. G. G. G.*

Whereon high words followed, which Torfrida tried in vain to stop. Hereward was flushed with ire and scorn.

'Magic armour, forsooth?' cried he at last. 'What care I for armour or for magic? I will wager to you'—'my armour,' he was on the point of saying, but he checked himself in time—'any horse in my stable, that I go in my shirt to Scaldmariland, and bring back that mare single-handed.'



‘Hark to the Englishman’ He has turned Berserker at last, like his forefathers. You will surely start in a pair of hose as well, or the ladies will be shamed?’

And so forth, till Torfrida was purple with shame, and wished herself fathoms deep; and Adela of France called sternly from the head of the table to ask what the wrangling meant

‘It is only the English Berserker, the Lady Torfrida’s champion,’ said some one in his most courteous tone, ‘who is not yet as well acquainted with the customs of knighthood as that fair lady hopes to make him hereafter.’

‘Torfrida’s champion?’ asked Adela, in a tone of surprise, if not scorn.

‘If any knight quarrels with my Hereward, he quarrels with Robert himself!’ thundered Count Robert. ‘Silence!’

And so the matter was hushed up.

The banquet ended; and they walked out into the garden to cool their heads, and play at games, and dance.

Torfrida avoided Hereward: but he, with the foolish pertinacity of a man who knows he has had too much wine, and yet pretends to himself that he has not, would follow her, and speak to her.

She turned away more than once. At last she was forced to speak to him.

‘So! You have made me a laughing-stock to these knights. You have scorned at my gifts. You have said—and before these men, too—that you need neither helm nor hauberk. Give me them back, then, Berserker as you are, and go sleep off your wine.’

‘That will I,’ laughed Hereward boisterously

‘You are tipsy,’ said she, ‘and do not know what you say.’

‘You are angry, and do not know what you say. Hearken, proud lass. I will take care of one thing, and that is, that you shall speak the truth.’

‘Did I not say that you were tipsy?’

‘Pish! You said that I was a Berserker. And truth

you shall speak ; for baresark I go to-morrow to the war, and baresark I win that mare or die.'

'That will be very fit for you.'

And the two turned haughtily from each other.

Ere Torfrida went to bed that night, there was a violent knocking. Angry as she was, she was yet anxious enough to hurry out of her chamber, and open the door herself.

Martin Lightfoot stood there with a large leather mail, which he flung at her feet somewhat unceremoniously.

'There is some gear of yours,' said he, as it clanged and rattled on the floor.

'What do you mean, man?'

'Only that my master bid me say that he cares as little for his own life as you do.' And he turned away.

She caught him by the arm—

'What is the meaning of this? What is in this mail?'

'You should know best. If young folks cannot be content when they are well off, they will go farther and fare worse,' says Martin Lightfoot. And he slipped from her grasp and fled into the night.

She took the mail to her room and opened it. It contained the magic armour.

All her anger was melted away. She cried ; she blamed herself. He would be killed ; his blood would be on her head. She would have carried it back to him with her own hands ; she would have entreated him on her knees to take it back. But how face the courtiers ? and how find him ? Very probably, too, he was by that time hopelessly drunk. And at that thought she drew herself into herself, tried to harden her heart again, and went to bed, but not to sleep. Bitterly she cried as she thought over the old hag's croon—

'Quick joy, long pain,  
You will take your gift again'

It might have been five o'clock the next morning when the clarion rang down the street. She sprang up and drest herself quickly ; but never more carefully or gaily.

She heard the tramp of horse-hoofs. He was moving a-field early, indeed. Should she go to the window to bid him farewell? Should she hide herself in just anger?

She looked out stealthily through the blind of the little window in the gable. There rode down the street Robert the Frisian in full armour, and behind him, knight after knight, a wall of shining steel. But by his side rode one bare-headed, his long yellow curls floating over his shoulders. His boots had golden spurs, a gilt belt held up his sword; but his only dress was a silk shirt and silk hose. He laughed and sang, and made his horse caracol, and tossed his lance in the air, and caught it by the point as he passed under the window.

She threw open the blind, careless of all appearances. She would have called to him. but the words choked her; and what should she say?

He looked up boldly, and smiled.

‘Farewell, fair lady mine. Drunk I was last night, but not so drunk as to forget a promise.’

And he rode on, while Torfrida rushed away and broke into wild weeping.

*The great marquis.* Baldwin of Flanders.

*Scheidt.* The river which divides Flanders from Holland.

*Trophy.* A thing won from a vanquished enemy.

*Countess Gertrude.* The widow of a Count of Holland. Her husband had been an ally of Baldwin.

*Buffet.* A hard blow

*Scaldmariland.* The old name for Holland.

*Adela of France.* Daughter of Robert, King of France; wife to Baldwin.

*Pertinacity.* Obstinate behaviour.

*Mail.* Network.

*Gear of yours.* Something belonging to you.

*Croon.* A song hummed softly.

*Clarion.* The trumpet.

*Caracol.* Prance and gambol.



His only dress was a silk shirt and silk hose. He laughed and sang, and made his horse cancol, and tossed his lance in the air.—Page 80

## CHAPTER XIX

## HOW HEReward WON MARE SWALLOW (1)

ON a bench at the door of his high-roofed wooden house sat Dirk Hammerhand, the richest man in Walcheren. From within the house sounded the pleasant noise of slave-women, grinding and chatting at the handquern; from without, the pleasant noise of geese and fowls without number. And as he sat and drank his ale, and watched the herd of horses in the fen, he thought himself a happy man.

As he looked at the horses, some half mile off, he saw a strange stir among them. They began whinnying and pawing round a fourfooted thing in the midst, which might be a badger, or a wolf—though both were very uncommon in that pleasant isle of Walcheren; but which plainly had no business there. Whereon he took up a mighty staff, and strode over the fen to see.

He found neither wolf nor badger: but to his exceeding surprise, a long lean man, clothed in ragged horse-skins, whinnying and neighing exactly like a horse, and then stooping to eat grass like one. He advanced to do the first thing that came into his head, namely, to break the man's back with his staff, and ask him afterwards who he might be. But ere he could strike, the man or horse kicked up with its hind legs in his face, and then springing on to the said hind legs ran away with extraordinary swiftness some fifty yards; after which it went down on all fours and began grazing again.

'Beest thou man or devil?' cried Dirk, somewhat frightened.

The thing looked up. The face at least was human.

'Art thou a Christian man?' asked it in bad Frisian, intermixed with snorts and neighs.

'What's that to thee?' growled Dirk; and began to

wish a little that he was one, having heard that the sign of the cross was of great virtue in driving away fiends.

'Thou art not Christian. Thou believest in Thor and Odin? Then there is hope.'

'Hope of what?' Dirk was growing more and more frightened.

'Of her, my sister! Ah, my sister, can it be that I shall find thee at last, after ten thousand miles, and seven years of woeful wandering?'

'I have no man's sister here. At least, my wife's brother was killed——'

'I speak not of a sister in woman's shape. Mine, alas! —O woeful prince, O more woeful princess—eats the herb of the field somewhere in the shape of a mare, as ugly as she was once beautiful, but swifter than the swallow on the wing.'

'I've none such here,' quoth Dirk, thoroughly frightened, and glancing uneasily at mare Swallow.

'You have not? Alas, wretched me! It was prophesied to me by the witch that I should find her in the field of one who worshipped the old gods; for had she come across a holy priest, she had been a woman again, long ago. Whither must I wander afresh!' And the thing began weeping bitterly, and then ate more grass.

'I—that is—thou poor miserable creature,' said Dirk, half pitying, half wishing to turn the subject; 'leave off making a beast of thyself awhile, and tell me who thou art'

'I have made no beast of myself, most noble earl, for so you doubtless are. I was made a beast of—a horse of, by an enchanter of a certain land, and my sister a mare.'

'Thou dost not say so!' quoth Dirk, who considered such an event quite possible.

'I was a prince of the county of Alboronia, which lies between Cathay and the Mountains of the Moon, as fair once as I am foul now, and only less fair than my lost sister; and by the enchantments of a cruel magician we became what we are.'

‘But thou art not a horse, at all events?’

‘Am I not? Thou knowest, then, more of me than I do of myself,’ and it ate more grass. ‘But hear the rest of my story. My hapless sister was sold away with me to a merchant: but I, breaking loose from him, fled until I bathed in a magic fountain. At once I recovered my man’s shape, and was rejoicing therein, when out of the fountain rose a fairy more beautiful than an elf, and smiled upon me with love

‘She asked me my story, and I told it. And when it was told—“Wretch!” she cried, “and coward, who hast deserted thy sister in her need. I would have loved thee, and made thee immortal as myself but now thou shalt wander ugly and eating grass, clothed in the horse-hide which has just dropped from thy limbs, till thou shalt find thy sister, and bring her to bathe, like thee, in this magic well.”’

‘All good spirits help us! And you are really a prince?’

‘As surely,’ cried the thing with a voice of sudden rapture, ‘as that mare is my sister’, and he rushed at mare Swallow. ‘I see, I see, my mother’s eyes, my father’s nose——’

‘He must have been a chuckle-headed king that, then,’ grinned Dirk to himself. ‘The mare’s nose is as big as a buck-basket. But how can she be a princess, man—prince I mean? she has a foal running by her here.’

‘A foal?’ said the thing solemnly. ‘Let me behold it. Alas, alas, my sister! Thy tyrant’s threat has come true, that thou shouldst be his bride whether thou wouldst or not. I see, I see in the features of thy son his hated lineaments.’

‘Why he must be as like a horse, then, as your father. But this will not do, Master Horse-man; I know that foal’s pedigree better than I do my own.’

‘Man, man, simple though honest!—Hast thou never heard of the skill of the enchanters of the East? How they transform their victims at night back again into human shape, and by day into the shape of beasts again?’

‘Yes—well—I know that——’

‘And do you not see how you are deluded? Every night, doubt not, that mare and foal take their human shape again; and every night, perhaps, that foul enchanter visits in your fen, perhaps in your very stable, his wretched bride restored (alas, only for an hour) into her human shape.’

‘An enchanter in my stable? That is an ugly guest. But no. I’ve been into the stables fifty times, to see if that mare was safe. Mare was mare, and colt was colt, Mr. Prince, if I have eyes to see.’

‘And what are eyes against enchantments? The moment you opened the door, the spell was cast over them again. You ought to thank your stars that no worse has happened yet; that the enchanter, in fleeing, has not wrung your neck as he went out, or cast a spell on you, which will fire your barns, lame your geese, give your fowls the pip, your horses the glanders, your cattle the murrain, your children St Vitus’ dance, your wife the creeping palsy, and yourself the chalk-stones in all your fingers.’

‘All saints have mercy on me! If the half of this be true, I will turn Christian. I will send for a priest, and be baptized to-morrow!’

‘O my sister, my sister! Dost thou not know me? Dost thou answer my caresses with kicks? Or is thy heart, as well as thy body, so enchained by that cruel necromancer, that thou preferrest to be his, and scornest thine own salvation, leaving me to eat grass till I die?’

‘I say, prince—I say—what would you have a man to do? I bought the mare honestly, and I have kept her well. She can’t say aught against me on that score. And whether she be princess or not, I’m loth to part with her.’

‘Keep her then, and keep with her the curse of all the saints and angels. Look down, ye holy saints’ (and the thing poured out a long string of saints’ names), ‘and avenge this catholic princess, kept in vile durance by an unbaptized heathen! May his——’

‘Don’t, don’t!’ roared Dirk. ‘And don’t look at me



like that' (for he feared the evil eye), 'or I'll brain you with my staff!'

'Fool! If I have lost a horse's figure, I have not lost his swiftness. Ere thou couldst strike, I should have run a mile and back, to curse thee afresh.' And the thing ran round him, and fell on all fours again, and ate grass.

'Mercy, mercy! And that is more than I ever asked yet of man. But it is hard,' growled he, 'that a man should lose his money, because a rogue sells him a princess in disguise'

'Then sell her again, sell her, as thou valuest thy life, to the first Christian man thou meetest. And yet no. What matters? Ere a month be over, the seven years' enchantment will have passed; and she will return to her own shape, with her son, and vanish from thy farm, leaving thee to vain repentance; whereby thou wilt both lose thy money and get her curse. Farewell, and my *malison* abide with thee!'

And the thing, without another word, ran right away, neighing as it went, leaving Dirk in a state of abject terror.

*Walcheren.* An island of Holland, lying between the mouths of the Scheldt.

*Handquerna.* A mill for grinding corn, worked by the hand.

*Whinnying.* Neighing

*Best thou* Are you.

*Thor and Odin.* The two chief gods of the Northmen.

*Alboronia.* An imaginary country

*Cathay.* The name given in the Middle Ages to China, or *Tartary*.

*Mountains of the Moon.* A range in East Africa.

*Buck-basket.* A basket in which dirty linen is carried to be washed.

*Linaments.* Features.

*Murrain.* A plague affecting cattle.

*Necromancer.* A wizard or magician.

*Durance.* Captivity.

*Malison.* Curse.

## CHAPTER XX

## HOW HEReward WON MARE SWALLOW (2)

HE went home. He cursed the mare, he cursed the man who sold her, he cursed the day he saw her, he cursed the day he was born. He told his story with exaggerations and confusions in plenty to all in the house; and terror fell on them likewise. No one, that evening, dared go down into the fen to drive the horses up; while Dirk got very drunk, went to bed, and trembled there all night (as did the rest of the household), expecting the enchanter to enter on a flaming fire-drake, at every howl of the wind.

The next morning, as Dirk was going about his business with a doleful face, casting stealthy glances at the fen, to see if the mysterious mare was still there, and a chance of his money still left, a man rode up to the door.

He was poorly clothed, with a long rusty sword by his side. A broad felt hat, long boots, and a haversack behind his saddle, showed him to be a traveller, seemingly a horse-dealer; for there followed him, tied head and tail, a brace of sorry nags.

'Heaven save all here,' quoth he, making the sign of the cross. 'Can any good Christian give me a drink of milk?'

'Ale, if thou wilt,' said Dirk. 'But what art thou, and whence?'

On any other day he would have tried to coax his guest into trying a buffet with him for his horse and clothes. but this morning his heart was heavy with the thought of the enchanted mare, and he welcomed the chance of selling her to the stranger.

'We are not very fond of strangers about here, since these Flemings have been harrying our borders. If thou art a spy, it will be worse for thee.'

'I am neither spy nor Fleming, but a poor servant of the Lord Bishop of Utrecht's, buying a garron or two

for his lordship's priests. As for these Flemings, may St John Baptist save from them both me and you. Do you know of any man who has horses to sell hereabouts?'

'There are horses in the fen yonder,' quoth Dirk, who knew that churchmen were likely to give a liberal price, and pay in good silver.

'I saw them as I rode up. And a fine lot they are; but of too good a stamp for my short purse, or for my holy master's riding,—a fat priest likes a quiet nag, my master.'

'Humph. Well, if quietness is what you need, there is a mare down there, that a child might ride with a thread of wool. But as for price—— And she has a colt, too, running by her.'

'Ah?' quoth the horseman. 'Well, your Walcheren folk make good milk, that's certain. A colt by her? That's awkward. My lord does not like young horses; and it would be troublesome, too, to take the thing along with me.'

The less anxious the dealer seemed to buy, the more anxious grew Dirk to sell; but he concealed his anxiety, and let the stranger turn away, thanking him for his drink.

'I say!' he called after him. 'You might look at her, as you ride past the herd.'

The stranger assented; and they went down into the fen, and looked over the precious mare, whose feats were afterwards sung by many an English fireside, or in the forest beneath the hollins green, by such as Robin Hood and his merry men. The ugliest as well as the swiftest of mares she was, say the old chroniclers; and it was not till the stranger had looked twice at her, that he forgot her great chuckle-head, greyhound flanks, and drooping hind-quarters, and began to see the great length of those same quarters, the thighs let down into the hocks, the compact loin, the extraordinary girth through the saddle, the sloping shoulder, the long arms, the flat knees, the large well-set hoofs, and all the other points which showed her strength and speed, and justified her fame.

'She might carry a big man like you through the mud,'

said he carelessly ; ' but as for pace, one cannot expect that with such a chuckle-head. And if one rode her through a town, the boys would call after one, " All head and no tail." Why, I can't see her tail for her croup, it is so ill set on.'

' Ill set on, or none,' said Dirk testily, ' don't go to speak against her pace till you have seen it. Here, lass !'

Dirk was in his heart rather afraid of the princess, but he was comforted when she came up to him like a dog.

' She's as sensible as a woman,' said he ; and then grumbled to himself, ' may be she knows I mean to part with her.'

' Lend me your saddle,' said he to the stranger.

The stranger did so ; and Dirk, mounting, galloped her in a ring. There was no doubt of her powers as soon as she began to move.

' I hope you won't remember this against me, madam,' said Dirk, as soon as he got out of the stranger's hearing. ' I can't do less than sell you to a Christian. And certainly I have been as good a master to you as if I'd known who you were ; but if you wish to stay with me, you've only to kick me off, and say so ; and I'm yours to command.'

' Well, she can gallop a bit,' said the stranger, as Dirk pulled her up and dismounted ; ' but an ugly brute she is, nevertheless, and such an one as I should not care to ride, for I am a gay man among the ladies. However, what is your price ?'

Dirk named twice as much as he would have taken.

' Half that, you mean.' And the usual haggle began.

' Tell thee what,' said Dirk at last. ' I am a man who has his fancies ; and this shall be her price ; half thy bid, and a box on the ear.'

The demon of covetousness had entered Dirk's heart. What if he got the money, brained, or at least disabled the stranger, and so had a chance of selling the mare a second time to some fresh comer ?

' Thou art a strange fellow,' quoth the horse-dealer. ' But so be it.'

Dirk chuckled. ' He does not know,' thought he, ' that

he has to do with Dirk Hammerhand,' and he clenched his fist in anticipation of his rough joke.

'There,' quoth the stranger, counting out the money carefully, 'is thy coin. And there—is thy box on the ear.'

And with a blow which rattled over the fen, he felled Dirk Hammerhand to the ground.

He lay senseless for a moment, and then looked wildly round.

'Villain!' groaned he. 'It was I who was to give the buffet, not thou!'

'Art mad?' asked the stranger, as he coolly picked up the coins, which Dirk had scattered in his fall. 'It is the seller's business to take, and the buyer's to give.'

And while Dirk roared in vain for help, he leapt on Swallow, and rode off shouting,

'Aha' Dirk Hammerhand! So you thought to knock a hole in my skull, as you have done to many a better man than yourself? He must be a luckier man than you who catches The Wake asleep. I shall give your love to the enchanted prince, my faithful serving man, whom they call Martin Lightfoot.'

Dirk cursed the day he was born. Instead of the mare and colt, he had got the two wretched garrons which the stranger had left, and a face which made him so tender of his own teeth, that he never again offered to try a buffet with a stranger.

*Fire-drake.* A fiery serpent guarding hidden treasure.

*Haversack.* A leather wallet or bag.

*Sorry.* In miserable condition.

*Buffet.* A severe blow.

*Flemings.* The inhabitants of Flanders.

*Harrying.* Laying waste.

*Utrecht.* An ancient city of Holland.

*Garron.* A small horse.

*Hollins.* Hollies.

*Haggle.* A dispute as to price.

## CHAPTER XXI

## HOW HEReward RODE INTO BRUGES LIKE A BEGGARMAN

THE spring and summer had passed, and the autumn was almost over, when great news came to the court of Bruges, where Torfrida was now a bower-maiden.

The Zeelanders had been beaten till they submitted; at least for the present.

And Hereward?

From him, or of him, there was no word. That he was alive and fighting was all the messenger could say.

Then Robert came back to Bruges, with a gallant retinue, leading home his bride. And Torfrida went out with the nobles to meet Count Robert, and looked for Hereward, till her eyes were ready to fall out of her head. But Hereward was not with them.

'He must be left behind, commanding the army,' thought she. 'But he might have sent one word!'

There was a great feast that day, of course; and Torfrida sat thereat: but she could not eat. Nevertheless she was too proud to let the knights know what was in her heart, so she chatted and laughed as gaily as the rest, watching always for any word of Hereward. But none mentioned his name.

The feast was long; the ladies did not rise till nigh bedtime; and then the men drank on.

They went up to the queen-countess' chamber, where a solemn undressing of that royal lady usually took place.

The etiquette was this. The queen-countess sat in her chair of state in the midst, till her shoes were taken off, and her hair dressed for the night. Right and left of her, according to their degrees, sat the other great ladies; and behind each of them, where they could find places, the maidens.

It was Torfrida's turn to take off the royal shoes; and she advanced into the middle of the semicircle, slippers in hand.

‘Stop there!’ said the countess-queen ‘I hear that him to whom you gave your love, you drove out to the cold, bidding him go fight in his bare shirt, if he wished to win your love.’

‘I did not. He angered me—He——’ and Torfrida found herself in the act of accusing Hereward.

She stopped instantly.

‘What more, your highness? If this be true, what more may not be true of such an one as I? I submit myself to your royal grace.’

‘She has confessed. What punishment, ladies, does she deserve? We will marry her to the first man who enters the castle.’

Torfrida looked at her mistress to see if she were mad. But the countess-queen was serene and sane. Then Torfrida’s Southern heat and northern courage burst forth.

‘You? marry? me? to?——’ said she slowly, with eyes so fierce and lips so livid, that Adela herself quailed.

There was a noise of shouting and laughing in the court below, which made all turn and listen.

The next moment a serving-man came in, puzzled, and inclined to laugh.

‘May it please your highness, here is the strangest adventure. There is ridden into the castle-yard a beggar-man with scarce a shirt to his back, on a great ugly mare with a foal running by her; and a fool behind him carrying lance and shield. And he says that he is come to fight any knight of the court, ragged as he stands, for the fairest lady in the court, be she who she may, if she have not a wedded husband already.’

‘And what says my lord marquis?’

‘That it is a fair challenge and a good adventure; and that fight he shall, if any man will answer his defiance.’

‘And I say, tell my lord marquis that fight he shall not; for he shall have the fairest maiden in this court for the trouble of carrying her away, and that I, Adela of France, will give her to him. So let that beggar dismount, and be brought up hither to me.’

There was silence again. Torfrida looked round her once more to see whether or not she was dreaming, and whether there was one human being to whom she could appeal.

Married to a beggar! It was a strange accident, and an ugly one, and a great cruelty and wrong. But it was not impossible, hardly improbable, in days when the caprice of the strong created accidents, and when cruelty and wrong went for nothing, even with very kindly honest folk. So Torfrida faced the danger, as she would have faced that of a kicking horse or a flooded ford; and pulled out a little penknife, and considered that the beggarman could wear no armour, and that she wore none either. For if she succeeded in slaying that beggarman, she might need to slay herself after, to avoid being—according to the fashion of those days—burnt alive.

So when the arras was drawn back, and that beggarman came into the room, instead of shrieking, fainting, hiding, or turning, she made three steps straight toward him, looking him in the face like a wild cat at bay. Then she threw up her arms, and fell upon his neck.

It was Hereward himself. Filthy, ragged. but Hereward.

His shirt was brown with gore, and torn with wounds; and through its rents showed more than one hardly healed scar. His hair and beard was all in elf-locks; and one heavy cut across the head had shorn not only hair, but brain-pan very close.

But Hereward it was; and regardless of all beholders, she lay upon his neck, and never stirred nor spoke.

‘I call you to witness, ladies,’ cried the queen-countess, ‘that I am guiltless. She has given herself to this beggarman of her own free will.’

‘Hereward,’ said Torfrida, a week after, ‘and did you never change your shirt all that time?’

‘Never. I kept my promise.’

‘But it must have been very nasty.’

‘Well. I bathed now and then.’



‘But it must have been very cold.’

‘I am warm enough now.’

‘But did you never comb your hair, either?’

‘Well, I won’t say that. Travellers find strange bedfellows. But I had half a mind never to do it at all, just to spite you.’

‘And what matter would it have been to me?’

‘Oh’ none. It is only a Danish fashion we have of keeping clean.’

‘Clean’ You were dirty enough when you came home How silly you were’ If you had sent me but one word!’

‘You would have fancied me beaten, and scolded me all over again. I know your ways now, Torfrida.’

*Zealanders.* The inhabitants of Zealand, a province of Holland

*Retinue.* A train of attendants.

*His bride.* Gertrude, the widowed countess of Holland, with whose rebellious vassals Robert had been fighting.

*Thereat.* At that place.

*Etiquette* A form of proceeding

*Quailed.* Trembled; was afraid.

*Cuprice* Changeable fancies.

*Arras.* Tapestry.

*Bay.* Making a desperate stand for its life.

## CHAPTER XXII

### ✓ HOW HAROLD GODWINSSON WROTE TO HEREWARD

THE winter passed in sweet madness; and for the first time in her life Torfrida regretted the lengthening of the days, and the flowering of the primroses, and the return of the now needless wryneck; for they warned her that Hereward must forth to the wars in Scaldmariland, which had broken out again, as was to be expected, as soon as Count Robert and his bride had turned their backs.

And Hereward, likewise for the first time in his life, was loth to go to war.

So he would have fain stayed at home at St. Omer; but he was Robert's man, and his good friend likewise; and to the wars he must go forth once more; and for eight or nine weary months Torfrida was alone.

At last the short November days came round, and a joyful woman was fair Torfrida, when Martin Lightfoot ran into the hall, and throwing himself down on the rushes like a dog, announced that Hereward and his men would be home before noon, and then fell fast asleep.

There was bustling to and fro of her and her maids, decking of the hall in the best hangings, strewing of fresh rushes, to the dislodgment of Martin, setting out of boards and trestles, and stoops and mugs thereon; cooking of victuals, broaching of casks; and, above all, for Hereward's self, heating of much water, and setting out, in the inner chamber, of the great bath-tub and bath-sheet, which was the special delight of a hero fresh from war.

And by mid-day the streets of St. Omer rang with clank, and tramp, and trumpet-blare, and in marched Hereward and all his men, and swung round through the gateway into the court, where Torfrida stood to welcome them, as fair as day, a silver stirrup-cup in her hand. And while the men were taking off their harness and dressing their horses, she and Hereward went in together, and either took such joy of the other, that a year's parting was forgot in a minute's meeting.

'Now!' cried she, in a tone half of triumph, half of tenderness; 'look there!'

'A cradle? And a baby?'

'Your baby.'

'Is it a boy?' asked Hereward, who saw in his mind's eye a thing which would grow and broaden at his knee year by year, and learn from him to ride, to shoot, to fight.

'Do not be vexed. It is a girl.'

'Well, yes, I am glad that it is a girl.'

'I thought you seemed vexed. Why did you cross yourself?'

'Because I thought to myself, how unfit I was to bring

up a boy to be such a knight as—as you would have him ; —how likely I was, ere all was over, to make him as great a ruffian as myself.’

‘Hereward ! Hereward !’ and she threw her arms round his neck for the tenth time. ‘Blessed be you for those words ! Those are the fears which never come true, for they bring down from heaven the grace of God, to guard the humble and contrite heart from that which it fears.’

‘Ah, Torfrida, I wish I were as good as you !’

‘Now—my joy and my life, my hero and my scald—I have great news for you, as well as a little baby. News from England.’

‘You, and a baby over and above, are worth all England to me.’

‘But listen. Edward the king is dead.’

‘Then there is one fool less on earth ; and one saint more, I suppose, in heaven.’

‘And Harold Godwinsson is king in his stead. And he has married your niece Aldytha, and sworn friendship with her brothers.’

‘I expected no less. Well, every dog has his day.’

‘And his will be a short one. William of Normandy has sworn to drive him out.’

‘Then he will do it. And the houses of Godwin and Leofric will rush into each other’s arms, and perish together ! Fools, fools, fools ! I will hear no more of such a mad world. My queen, tell me about your sweet self. What is all this to me ? Am I not a wolf’s head, and a landless man ?’

‘O my king, have not the stars told me that you will be an earl and a ruler of men, when all your foes are ‘wolves’ heads as you are now ? And the weird is coming true already. Tosti Godwinsson is in the town at this moment, an outlaw and a wolf’s head himself.’

Hereward laughed a great laugh.

‘Aha ! Every man to his right place at last. How comes he here ?’

‘The northern men rose, and killed his servant at

York; took all his treasures; and marched down to Northampton, plundering and burning. They would have marched on London town, if Harold had not met them there from the king. There they cried out against Tosti, and all his taxes, and his murders, and his changing Canute's laws, and would have your nephew Morcar for their earl. A tyrant they would not endure. Free they were born and bred, they said, and free they would live and die. Harold must needs do justice, even on his own brother.'

'Especially when he knows that that brother is his worst foe.'

'Harold is a better man than you take him for, my Hereward. But be that as it may, Morcar is earl; and Tosti outlawed, and here in St. Omer, with wife and child.'

'My nephew Earl of Northumbria! As I might have been, if I had been a wiser man.'

'If you had, you would never have found me.'

'True, my queen! They say heaven tempers the wind to the shorn lamb; but it tempers it too, sometimes, to the hobbled ass; and so it has done by me. And so the rogues have fallen out, and honest men may come by their own. For as the northern men have done by one brother, so will the eastern men do by the other. Let Harold see how many of those fat Lincolnshire manors, which he has seized into his own hands, he holds by this day twelve months. But what is all this to me, my queen, while you and I can kiss, and laugh the world to scorn?'

'This to you, beloved, that, great as you are, Torfrida must have you greater still; and out of all this coil and confusion you may win something, if you be wise.'

'Sweet lips, be still; and let us play instead of plotting.'

'And this, too—you shall not stop my mouth—that Harold Godwinsson has sent a letter to you.'

'Harold Godwinsson is my very good lord,' sneered Hereward.

‘And this it said, with such praises and courtesies concerning you as made my wife’s heart beat high with pride—“If Hereward Leofricsson will come home to England, he shall have his rights in law again, and his manors in Lincolnshire, and a thaneship in East Anglia, and manors for his men-at-arms; and if that be not enough, he shall have an earldom, as soon as there is one to give.”’

‘And what says to that Torfrida, Hereward’s queen?’

‘You will not be angry if I answered the letter for you?’

‘If you answered it in one way—no If another—yes.’

Torfrida trembled. Then she looked Hereward full in the face with her keen clear eyes.

‘Now shall I see whether I have given myself to Hereward in vain, body and soul, or whether I have trained him to be my true and perfect knight.’

‘You answered, then,’ said Hereward, ‘thus——’

‘Say on,’ said she, turning her face away again.

‘Hereward Leofricsson tells Harold Godwinsson that he is his equal, and not his man, and that he will never put his hands between the hands of a son of Godwin. An Etheling born, a king of the house of Cerdic, outlawed him from his right, and none but an Etheling born shall give him his right again.’

‘I said it, I said it. Those were my very words!’ and Torfrida burst into tears, while Hereward kissed her, almost fawned upon her, calling her his queen, his guardian angel.

‘I was sorely tempted,’ sobbed she. ‘Sorely. To see you rich and proud upon your own lands, an earl, may be—may be, I thought at whiles, a king. But it could not be. It did not stand with honour, my hero—not with honour.’

‘Not with honour. Get me gay garments out of the chest, and let us go royally, and royally feast my jolly riders.’

*Spoons. Vessels for holding liquor.*

*Trumpet-blare.* The loud sound of a trumpet.

*Stirrup-cup.* A cup of wine offered to those going on or coming from a journey.

*Edward the king* Edward the Confessor.

*Harold Godwinsson* Slain at Hastings, 1066.

*Allytha* Daughter of Alfgar, Hereward's elder brother.

*William of Normandy.* William the Conqueror.

*Weird* Fate, or fortune.

*Tosti Godwinsson* Brother of Harold the king

*Etheling.* A prince of royal blood. Here refers to Edward the Confessor

*Verdic.* The first king of the West Saxons. Died about 534.

## CHAPTER XXIII

### HOW WILLIAM THE NORMAN CONQUERED ENGLAND

It would be vain to attempt even a sketch of the reports which came to Flanders from England during the next two years; or of the conversations which ensued thereon between Baldwin and his courtiers, and between Hereward and Torfrida. Two reports out of three were doubtless false; and two conversations out of three founded on those false reports.

It is best, therefore, to interrupt the thread of the story by some small sketch of the state of England after the battle of Hastings, that so we may at least guess at the tenor of Hereward and Torfrida's counsels.

William had, as yet, conquered little more than the south of England: hardly, indeed, all that; for Herefordshire, Worcestershire, and the neighbouring parts, which had belonged to Sweyn, Harold's brother, were still insecure; and the noble old city of Exeter, confident in her Roman walls, did not yield till two years after, in A.D. 1068.

North of his conquered territory, Mercia stretched almost across England, from Chester to the Wash, governed by Edwin and Morcar. Edwin called himself Earl of Mercia, and held the Danish burghs. On the extreme north-west, the Roman city of Chester was his; while on the extreme south-east (as Domesday-book testifies), Morcar still held large lands round Bourne and

throughout the south of Lincolnshire, besides calling himself the Earl of Northumbria. The young men seemed the darlings of the half Danish Northmen. Chester, Coventry, Derby, Nottingham, Leicester, Stamford, a chain of fortified towns stretching across England, were at their command.

Northumbria, likewise, was not yet in William's hands. Indeed it was in no man's hands, since the Free Danes north of the Humber had expelled Tosti, putting Morcar in his place. Morcar, instead of residing in his earldom of Northumbria, had made one Oswulf his deputy: but he had rivals enough.

William determined to propitiate the young earls. Perhaps he intended to govern the centre and north of England through them, as feudal vassals; and hoped meanwhile to pay his Norman conquerors sufficiently out of the forfeited lands of Harold, and those who had fought by his side at Hastings. It was not his policy to make himself, much less to call himself, the conqueror of England. He claimed to be its legitimate sovereign, deriving from his cousin Edward the Confessor; and whosoever would acknowledge him as such, had neither right nor cause to fear. Therefore he sent for the young earls, and promised Edwin his daughter in marriage.

So far all went well, till William went back to France; but while he sat at the Easter Feast displaying the treasures of Edward's palace at Westminster, and more English wealth than could be found in the whole estate of Gaul, while he sat there in his glory; at that very hour the hand-writing was on the wall, unseen by man, and he, and his policy, and his race, were weighed in the balance, and found wanting.

For now broke out in England that wrong-doing which endured as long as she was a mere foreign farm of Norman kings. Fitz-Osbern, and Odo the warrior-prelate, William's half-brother, had been left as his regents in England. Little do they seem to have cared for William's promise to the English people that they were to be ruled still by the laws of Edward the Confessor, and that where a grant

of land was made to a Norman he was to hold it as the Englishman had done before him, with no heavier burdens on himself, but with no heavier burdens on the poor folk who tilled the land for him. Oppression began, lawlessness, and violence; men were ill-treated on the highways; and women in their own homes.

Hot young Englishmen began to emigrate. Some went to the court of Constantinople. Some went to Scotland to Malcolm Canmore, and brooded over return and revenge. But Harold's sons went to their father's cousin, Ulfsson of Denmark, and called on him to come and reconquer England in the name of his uncle Canute the Great; and many an Englishman went with them.

But as yet the storm did not burst. William returned, and with him something like order. He conquered Exeter; he destroyed churches and towns to make his New Forest. He brought over his Queen Matilda with pomp and great glory; and with her, the Bayeux Tapestry which she had wrought with her own hands; and meanwhile Sweyn Ulfsson was too busy threatening the new King of Norway, to sail for England; and the sons of King Harold of England had to seek help from the Irish Danes; and, ravaging the country round Bristol, be beaten off by the valiant burghers with heavy loss.

So the storm did not burst; and need not have burst, it may be, at all, had William kept his plighted word. But he would not give his fair daughter to Edwin. His Norman nobles, doubtless, looked upon such an alliance as debasing to a civilised lady. In their eyes, the Englishman was a barbarian, and though the Norman might well marry the Englishwoman, if she had beauty or wealth, it was a dangerous precedent to allow the Englishman to marry the Norman woman, and that woman a princess. The young earls went off—one midlandward—one northward. The people saw their wrongs in those of their earls, and the rebellion burst forth at once; the Welsh under Blethyn, and the Cumbrians under Malcolm, giving their help in the struggle.



It was the year 1069, a more evil year for England than even the year of Hastings.

The rebellion was crushed in a few months. The great general marched steadily north, taking the boroughs one by one, storming, burning, sometimes, whole towns, massacring or mutilating young and old, and leaving, as he went on, a new portent, a Norman donjon—till then all but unseen in England—as a place of safety for his garrisons. At Oxford (sacked horribly, and all but destroyed), at Warwick (destroyed utterly), at Nottingham, at Stafford, at Shrewsbury, at Cambridge, on the huge barrow which overhangs the fen; and at York itself, which had opened its gates, trembling, to the great Norman strategist—at each doomed borough rose a castle, with its tall square tower within, its bailey around, and all the appliances of that ancient Roman science of fortification, of which the Danes, as well as the Saxons, knew nothing. Their struggle had only helped to tighten their bonds; and what wonder? There was among them neither unity, nor plan, nor governing mind and will. Hereward's words had come true. The only man who had a head in England, was Harold Godwinsson: and he lay in Waltham Abbey, while the monks sang masses for his soul.

Edwin and Morcar trembled before a genius superior to their own—a genius, indeed, which had not its equal in Christendom. They came in, and begged grace of the king. They got it. But Edwin's earldom was forfeited, and he and his brother became, from thenceforth, desperate men.

*Gaul* France.

*Hunt-writing on the wall.* A reference to the story of Belshazzar.

*Hot.* Passionate; impatient of restraint.

*Constantinople.* Then the capital city of the famous Byzantine or Eastern Empire.

*Malcolm Canmore.* Malcolm the Great, King of Scotland from 1057 to 1093.

*Bayeux Tapestry.* A celebrated tapestry showing many pictures of the Norman Conquest of England. Now preserved in the Public Library at Bayeux, a city of Normandy.

*Sveyn Ulfsson.* The King of Denmark, who was nephew to Canute.

*Plighted.* Promised

*Precedent.* Something that may be taken as an example

*Blethyn* A prince of North Wales, nephew to Edwin and Morear.

*Donjon.* The principal building in a castle

*Barrow* A mound of earth.

*Strategist.* One who is skilled in the art of directing military movements

*Barley* The external wall enclosing the outer courtyard of a castle.

## CHAPTER XXIV

### HOW EARL GODWIN'S WIDOW CAME TO ST. OMER

ONE day, about this time, Hereward was riding out of the gate of St Omer, when the porter appealed to him. Begging for admittance were some twenty women, and a clerk or two, and they must needs see the chatelain. The chatelain was away. What should he do?

Hereward looked at the party, and saw, to his surprise, that they were Englishwomen, and that two of them were women of rank, to judge from the rich materials of their travel-stained and tattered garments. The ladies rode on sorry country garrons, plainly hired from the peasants who drove them. The rest of the women had walked; and weary and footsore enough they were.

'You are surely Englishwomen?' asked he of the foremost as he lifted his cap.

The lady bowed assent, beneath a heavy veil.

'Then you are my guests. Let them pass in.' And Hereward threw himself off his horse, and took the lady's bridle.

'Stay,' she said, with an accent half Wessex, half Danish. 'I seek the Countess Judith, if it will please you to tell me where she lives'

'The Countess Judith, lady, is no longer in St. Omer. Since her husband's death, she lives with her mother at Bruges.'

The lady made a gesture of disappointment.

'It were best for you, therefore, to accept my hospitality, till such time as I can send you and your ladies on to Bruges.'

'I must first know who it is who offers me hospitality.'

This was said so proudly, that Hereward answered proudly enough in return—

'I am Hereward Leofricsson, whom his foes call Hereward the outlaw ; and his friends, Hereward the master of knights.'

She started, and threw her veil back, looking intently at him. He, for his part, gave but one glance, and then cried—

'Mother of heaven ! You are the great countess !'

'Yes, I was that woman once, if all be not a dream. I am now I know not what, seeking hospitality—if I can believe my eyes and ears—of Godiva's son'

'And from Godiva's son you shall have it, as though you were Godiva's self. God so deal with my mother, madam, as I will deal with you.'

'His father's wit, and his mother's beauty !' said the great countess, looking upon him. 'Too, too like my own lost Harold !'

'Not so, my lady. I am a dwarf compared to him.' And Hereward led the garron on by the bridle, keeping his cap in hand, while all wondered who the dame could be, before whom Hereward the champion would so abase himself.

'Leofric's son does me too much honour. He has forgotten, in his chivalry, that I am Godwin's widow.'

'I have not forgotten that you are niece of Canute, king of kings. Neither have I forgotten that you are an English lady, in times in which all English folk are one, and all old English feuds are wiped away.'

'In English blood. Ah ! if these last words of yours were true, as you, perhaps, might make them true, England might be saved even yet.'

'Saved ?'

'If there were one man in it, who cared for aught but himself'

Hereward was silent and thoughtful.

He had sent Martin back to his house, to tell Torfrida to prepare bath and food, for the Countess Gyda, with all her train, was coming to be her guest. And when they entered the court, Torfrida stood ready.

'Is this your lady?' asked Gyda, as Hereward lifted her from her horse.

'I am his lady and your servant,' said Torfrida, bowing.

'Child! child! Bow not to me Talk not of servants to a wretched slave, who only longs to crawl into some hole and die, forgetting all she was, and all she had.'

And the great countess reeled with weariness and woe, and fell upon Torfrida's neck.

A tall veiled lady next her helped to support her; and between them they almost carried her through the hall, and into Torfrida's best guest-chamber.

And there they gave her wine, and comforted her, and let her weep awhile in peace.

The second lady had unveiled herself, displaying a beauty which was still brilliant, in spite of sorrow, hunger, the stains of travel, and more than forty years of life.

'She must be Gunhilda,' guessed Torfrida to herself, and not amiss.

She offered Gyda a bath, which she accepted eagerly, like a true Dane.

'I have not washed for weeks. Not since we sat starving on the Flat Holm there, in the Severn sea. I have become as foul as my own fortunes; and why not? It is all of a piece. Why should not beggars go unwashed?'

But when Torfrida offered Gunhilda the bath, she declined.

'I have done, lady, with such carnal vanities. What use in cleaning the body which is itself unclean, and whitening the outside of this sepulchre? If I can but cleanse my soul fit for my heavenly Bridegroom, the body may become—as it must at last—food for worms.'

'She will needs enter religion, poor child,' said Gyda; 'and what wonder?'

'I have chosen the better part, and it shall not be taken from me.'

'Taken! Taken! Hark to her. She means to mock me, the proud nun, with that same "taken."'

'God forbid, mother!'

'Then why say taken, to me from whom all is taken?—Husband, sons, wealth, land, renown, power—power which I loved, wretch that I was, as well as husband and as sons. Ah God! the girl is right. Better to rot in the convent than writhe in the world. Better never to have had, than to have had and lost.'

'Amen!' said Gunhilda. '"Blessed are the barren, and they that never gave suck," saith the Lord'

'No! Not so!' cried Torfrida. 'Better, countess, to have had and lost, than never to have had at all. The glutton was right, swine as he was, when he said that not even heaven could take from him the dinners he had eaten. How much more we, if we say, not even heaven can take from us the love wherewith we have loved? Will not our souls be richer thereby through all eternity?'

'In purgatory?' asked Gunhilda.

'In purgatory, or where else you will. I love my love; and though my love prove false, he has been true; though he trample me under foot, he has held me in his bosom; though he kill me, he has lived for me. Better to have been his but for one day, than never to have been his at all. What I have had will still be mine, when that which I have shall fail me'

'And you would buy short joy with lasting woe?'

'That would I, like a brave man's child. I say—The present is mine, and I will enjoy it as greedily as a child. Let the morrow take thought for the things of itself.—Countess, your bath is ready.'

Nineteen years after, when the great conqueror lay, tossing with agony and remorse, upon his dying bed, haunted by the ghosts of his victims, the clerks of St.

Saviour's in Bruges city were putting up a leaden tablet (which remains, they say, unto this very day) to the memory of one whose gentle soul had gently passed away. 'Charitable to the poor, kind and agreeable to her attendants, courteous to strangers, and only severe to herself,' Gunhilda had lingered on in a world of war and crime; and had gone, it may be, to meet Torfrida beyond the grave, and there finish their doubtful argument.

*Wessex.* The Anglo-Saxon kingdom, which extended over the greater part of the South and West of England.

*The Countess Judith.* Sister of Baldwin of Flanders; married Tostig, the son of Earl Godwin.

*The great countess.* Gyda, the widow of Earl Godwin, and mother of Harold, King of England.

*Fends.* Quarrels.

*Reeled* Staggered with uncertain steps

*Gunhilda.* The youngest daughter of Godwin and Gyda.

*Flat Holm* A small island in the Bristol Channel.

*Carnal.* Belonging to the body.

*Purgatory* A place in which it is supposed that souls of persons are purified after death.

*The great conqueror.* William.

## CHAPTER XXV

### HOW HEReward WENT TO ENGLAND

THE countess was served with food in Torfrida's chamber. Hereward and his wife refused to sit, and waited on her standing.

'I wish to show these saucy Flemings,' said he, 'that an English princess is a princess still in the eyes of one more nobly born than any of them.'

But after she had eaten, she made Torfrida sit before her on the bed, and Hereward likewise; and began to talk; eagerly, as one who had not unburdened her mind for many weeks; and eloquently too, as became Sprakaleg's daughter and Godwin's wife.

She told them how she had fled from the storm of

Exeter, with a troop of women who dreaded the brutalities of the Normans. How they had wandered up through Devon, found fishers' boats at Watchet in Somersetshire, and gone off to the little desert island of the Flat Holm, in hopes of there meeting with the Irish fleet which her sons, Edmund and Godwin, were bringing against the West of England. How the fleet had never come, and they had starved for many days; and how she had bribed a passing merchantman to take her and her wretched train to the land of Baldwin.

'And now,' she said, turning sharply on Hereward, 'what do you do here? Do you not know that your nephews' lands are parted between grooms from Angers and scullions from Normandy?'

'So much the worse for both them and the grooms.'

'Sir?'

'You forget, lady, that I am an outlaw.'

'But do you not know that your mother's lands are seized likewise?'

'She will take refuge with her grandsons, who are, as I hear, again on good terms with their new master, showing thereby a most laudable and Christian spirit of forgiveness.'

'On good terms? Do you not know, then, that they are fighting again, outlaws, and desperate at the Frenchman's treachery? Do you not know that they have been driven out of York, after defending the city street by street, house by house? Do you not know that there is not an old man nor a child in arms left in York; and that your nephews, and the few fighting men who were left, went down the Humber in boats, and north to Scotland? Do you not know that your mother is left alone—at Bourne, or God knows where—to endure at the hands of Norman ruffians what thousands more endure?'

Hereward made no answer, but played with his dagger.

'And do you know that England is ready to burst into a blaze, if there be one man wise enough to put the live coal into the right place? And that if there be one man in England of wit enough, and knowledge enough of

war, to lead the armies of England, the Frenchman may be driven into the sea——is there any here who understands English ?’

‘None but ourselves’

‘And Canute’s nephew sit on Canute’s throne’

Hereward still played with his dagger

‘Not the sons of Harold, then?’ asked he after a while.

‘Never! I promise you that—I, Countess Gyda, their grandmother.’

‘Why promise me, of all men, O great lady?’

‘Because—I will tell you after. But this I say, my curse on the grandson of mine who shall try to seize that fatal crown, which cost the life of my fairest, my noblest, my wisest, my bravest!’

Hereward bowed his head, as if consenting to the praise of Harold.

‘All that they, young and unskilful lads, have a right to ask is, their father’s earldoms and their father’s lands. Edwin and Morcar would keep their earldoms as of right.’

‘But what of Sweyn’s gallant holders and housecarles, who are to help to do this mighty deed?’

‘Senlac left gaps enough among the noblemen of the South, which they can fill up, in the place of the French scum who now riot over Wessex. And if that should suffice, what higher honour for me, or for my daughter the queen, than to devote our lands to the heroes who have won them back for us?’

Hereward hoped inwardly that Gyda would be as good as her word; for her greedy grasp had gathered to itself, before the battle of Hastings, no less than six-and-thirty thousand acres of good English soil.

‘I have always heard,’ said he, bowing, ‘that if the Lady Gyda had been born a man, England would have had another all-seeing and all-daring statesman, and Earl Godwin a rival, instead of a helpmate. Now I believe what I have heard.’

But Torfrida looked sadly at the countess. There was



something pitiable in the sight of a woman ruined, bereaved, seemingly hopeless, portioning out the very land from which she was a fugitive; unable to restrain the passion for intrigue which had been the toil and the bane of her sad and splendid life.

‘And now,’ she went on, ‘surely some kind saint brought me, even on my first landing, to you of all living men.’

‘Doubtless the blessed St. Bertin, beneath whose shadow we repose here in peace,’ said Hereward somewhat drily.

‘I will go barefoot to his altar to-morrow, and offer my last jewel,’ said Gunhilda.

‘You,’ said Gyda, without noticing her daughter, ‘are above all men the man who is needed.’ And she began praising Hereward’s valour, his fame, his eloquence, his skill as a general and engineer; and when he suggested, smiling, that he was an exile and an outlaw, she insisted that he was all the fitter from that very fact. He had no enemies among the nobles. He had been mixed up in none of the civil wars and blood feuds of the last fifteen years. He was known only as that which he was, the ablest English captain of his day—the only man who could cope with William, the only man whom all parties in England would alike obey.

And so, with flattery as well as with truth, she persuaded, if not Hereward, at least Torfrida, that he was the man destined to free England once more, and that an earldom—or anything which he chose to ask—would be the sure reward of his assistance.

‘Torfrida,’ said Hereward that night, ‘kiss me well; for you will not kiss me again for a while.’

‘What?’

‘I am going to England to-morrow.’

‘Alone?’

‘Alone. I and Martin to spy out the land, and a dozen or so of housecarles to take care of the ship in harbour.’

‘Hereward, Hereward, the French will kill you!’

'Not while I have your armour on. Peace, little fool' Are you actually afraid for Hereward at last?'

'Oh, heavens! when am I not afraid for you?' and she cried herself to sleep upon his bosom. But she knew that it was the right, and knightly, and Christian thing to do.

Two days after, a longship ran out of the Aa, and sailed away north.

*Saucy.* Ill-mannered, impertinent.

*Sprakaleg's daughter.* The Countess Gyda was the daughter of Thorgils Sprakaleg, King of Sweden.

*Angers.* The chief town of Anjou.

*Cunute's nephew.* Sweyn Ulfsson, King of Denmark.

*Senlac.* Hastings.

*Bane.* Ruin.

*Intrigue.* Plots of a complicated nature.

*Aa.* A river of the North of France, upon which St. Omer stands

## CHAPTER XXVI

### HOW HEReward CLEARED BOURNE OF FRENCHMEN (1)

It may have been well a week after, that Hereward came from the direction of Boston, with Martin running at his heels.

As Hereward rode along the summer wold the summer sun sank low, till just before it went down he came to an island of small enclosed fields, high banks, elm trees, and a farm inside; one of those most ancient holdings of the Southern and Eastern Counties, still to be distinguished, by their huge banks and dykes full of hedgerow timber, from the more modern corn-lands outside, which were in Hereward's time mostly common pasture-land or rough fen.

'This should be Azerdun,' said he; 'and there inside, as I live, stands Azer getting in his crops. But who has he with him?'

With the old man were some half-dozen men of his own rank; some helping the serfs with might and main,

one or two standing on the top of the banks, as if on the look-out; but all armed *cap-à-pié*.

‘His friends are helping him to get them in,’ quoth Martin, ‘for fear of the rascally Frenchmen. A pleasant and peaceable country we have come back to.’

‘And a very strong fortress are they holding,’ said Hereward, ‘against either French horsemen or French arrows. How to dislodge those six fellows without six times their number, I do not see. It is well to recollect that.’

And so he did; and turned to use again and again, in after years, the strategic capabilities of an old-fashioned English farm.

Hereward spurred his horse up to the nearest gate, and was instantly confronted by a little fair-haired man, as broad as he was tall, who heaved up a long twybill, or double axe, and bade him, across the gate, go to a certain place.

‘Little Winter, little Winter, my chuck, my darling, my mad fellow, my brother-in-arms, my brother in robbery and murder, are you grown so honest in your old age that you will not know little Hereward the wolf’s head?’

‘Hereward!’ shrieked the doughty little man ‘I took you for an accursed Norman in those outlandish clothes’; and lifting up no little voice, he shouted—

‘Hereward is back, and Martin Lightfoot at his heels!’

The gate was thrown open, and Hereward all but pulled off his horse. He was clapped on the back, turned round and round, admired from head to foot, shouted at by old companions of his boyhood, naughty young housecarles of his old troop, now settled down into honest thriving yeomen, hard working and hard fighting, who had heard again and again, with pride, his doughty doings over sea.

‘And what,’ asked Hereward, after the first congratulations were over, ‘of my mother? What of the folk at Bourne?’

All looked each at the other, and were silent.

‘You are too late, young lord,’ said Azer.

‘Too late?’

‘The Frenchman has given it to a man of Gilbert of Ghent’s—his butler, groom, cook, for aught I know.’

'To Gilbert's man? And my mother?'

'God help your mother, and your young brother too. She fled to Bourne a while ago out of Shropshire. All her lands in those parts are given away to Frenchmen. Even Coventry minster was not safe for her; so hither she came: but even here the French villains have found her out. Three days ago some five-and-twenty French marched into the place.'

'And you did not stop them?'

'Young sir, who are we to stop an army? We have enough to keep our own. Gilbert, let alone the villain Ivo of Spalding, can send a hundred men down on us in four-and-twenty hours.'

'Then I,' said Hereward in a voice of thunder, 'will find the way to send two hundred down on him'; and turning his horse from the gate, he rode away furiously towards Bourne.

He turned back as suddenly, and galloped into the field

'Lads! old comrades! will you stand by me if I need you? Will you follow The Wake, as hundreds have followed him already, if he will only go before?'

'We will, we will.'

'I shall be back ere morning. What you have to do, I will tell you then.'

'Stop and eat—but for a quarter of an hour.'

Then Hereward swore a great oath, by oak and ash and thorn, that he would neither eat bread nor drink water while there was a Norman left in Bourne.

'A little ale, then, if no water,' said Azer.

Hereward laughed, and rode away.

'You will not go single-handed against all those ruffians?' shouted the old man after him. 'Saddle, lads, and go with him, some of you, for very shame's sake.'

But when they galloped after Hereward, he sent them back. He did not know yet, he said, what he would do. Better that they should gather their forces, and see what men they could afford him, in case of open battle. And he rode swiftly on.

When he came within the lands of Bourne it was dark  
‘So much the better,’ thought Hereward. ‘I have no wish to see the old place till I have somewhat cleaned it out.’

He rode slowly into the long street between the overhanging gables, past the crossways, and along the Water-gang and the high earth-banks of his ancient home. Above them he could see the great hall, its narrow windows all ablaze with light. With a bitter growl he turned back, trying to recollect a house where he could safely lodge. Martin pointed one out.

‘Old Viking Surturbrand, the housecarle, did live there; and maybe lives there still.’

‘We will try’; and Martin knocked at the door.

The wicket was opened, but not the door; and through the wicket window a surly voice asked who was there.

‘Who lives here?’

‘Pery, son of Surturbrand. Who art thou who askest?’

‘An honest gentleman and his servant, looking for a night’s lodging.’

‘This is no place for honest folk.’

‘As for that, we don’t wish to be more honest than you would have us; but lodging we will pay for, freely and well.’

‘We want none of thy money’; and the wicket was shut.

Hereward rode close to the wicket, and said in a low voice, ‘I am a nobleman of Flanders, good sir, and a sworn foe to all French. My horse is weary, and cannot make a step forward; and if thou be a Christian man, thou wilt take me in and let me go off safe ere morning light.’

‘From Flanders!’ And the man turned and seemed to consult those within. At length the door was slowly opened, and Pery appeared, his double axe over his shoulder.

‘If thou be from Flanders, come in in God’s name; but be quick, ere those Frenchmen get wind of thee.’

Hereward went in. Five or six men were standing round the long table, upon which they had just laid down their double axes and javelins. More than one countenance Hereward recognised at once. Over the peat fire sat

a very old man, his hands upon his knees, as he warmed his bare feet at the embers. He started up at the noise, and Hereward saw at once that it was old Surturbrand, and that he was blind.

'Who is it? Is Hereward come?' asked he, with the dull dreamy voice of age.

'Not Hereward, father,' said some one, 'but a knight from Flanders.'

*Wold.* The open country.

*Strategic* Useful for purposes of war.

*Chuck.* Familiar friend.

*Doughty.* Full of pluck.

*Leo of Spalding.* A Norman follower of William the Conqueror, who had been put in possession of estates at Spalding.

*By oak and ash and thorn.* Trees regarded as specially sacred.

*Wicket* A small gate

*Water-gang.* A stream that ran through the town of Bourne.

## CHAPTER XXVII

### HOW HEREWARD CLEARED BOURNE OF FRENCHMEN (2)

THE old man dropped his head upon his breast again with a querulous whine, while Hereward's heart beat high at hearing his own name. At all events he was among friends; and approaching the table he unbuckled his sword and laid it down among the other weapons. 'At least,' said he, 'I shall have no need of thee as long as I am here among honest men.'

'What shall I do with my master's horse?' asked Martin. 'He can't stand in the street to be stolen by drunken French horseboys.'

'Bring him in at the front door, and out at the back,' said Pery. 'Fine times these, when a man dare not open his own yard gate.'

'You seem to be all besieged here,' said Hereward. 'How is this?'

'Besieged we are,' said the man; and then, partly to

turn the subject off, 'Will it please you to eat, noble, sir?'

Hereward declined: he had a vow, he said, not to eat or drink but once a day, till he had fulfilled a quest whereon he was bound. His hosts eyed him, not without some lingering suspicion, but still with admiration and respect. His splendid armour and weapons, as well as the golden locks which fell far below his shoulders, and conveniently hid a face which he did not wish yet to have recognised, showed him to be a man of the highest rank; while the palm of his small hand, as hard and bony as any woodman's, proclaimed him to be no novice of a fighting man. The strong Flemish accent which both he and Martin Lightfoot had assumed prevented the honest Englishmen from piercing his disguise. They watched him, while he in turn watched them, struck by their uneasy looks and sullen silence.

'We are a dull company,' said he after a while courteously enough. 'We used to be told in Flanders that there were none such stout drinkers and none such jolly singers as you gallant men of the Danelagh here.'

'Dull times make dull company,' said one, 'and no offence to you, sir knight.'

'Are you such a stranger,' asked Pery, 'that you do not know what has happened in this town during the last three days?'

'No good, I will warrant, if you have Frenchmen in it'

'Why was not Hereward here?' wailed the old man in the corner. 'It never would have happened if he had been in the town.'

'What?' asked Hereward, trying to command himself.

'What has happened,' said Pery, 'makes a free Englishman's blood boil to tell of. Here, sir knight, three days ago, comes in this Frenchman with some twenty ruffians of his own, and more of one Ivo's, as well, to see him safe; says that this new king, this base-born Frenchman, has given away all Earl Morcar's lands, and that Bourne is his; kills a man or two; upsets the women; gets drunk, ruffles

and roysters : breaks into my lady's bower, calling her to give up her keys , and when she gives them, will have all her jewels too. She faces the rogues like a brave princess : and two of the hounds lay hold of her, and say that she shall ride through Bourne as she rode through Coventry. The boy Godwin—he that was the great earl's godson, our last hope, the last of our house—draws sword on them ; and he, a boy of sixteen summers, kills them both out of hand. The rest set on him, cut his head off, and there it sticks on the gable spike of the hall to this hour. And do you ask, after that, why free Englishmen are dull company ?'

'And our turn will come next,' growled some one. 'The turn will go all round ; no man's life or land, wife or daughters, will be safe soon for these accursed Frenchmen unless, as the old man says, Hereward comes back.'

Once again the old man wailed out of the chimney corner : 'Why did they ever send Hereward away ? I warned the good earl, I warned my good lady, many a time, to let him sow his wild oats and be done with them, or they might need him some day when they could not find him. He was a lad ! He was a lad !' and again he whined, and sank into silence.

Hereward heard all this dry-eyed, hardening his heart into a great resolve.

'This is a dark story,' said he calmly ; 'and it would behove me as a gentleman to succour this distressed lady, did I but know how. Tell me what I can do now, and I will do it.'

'Your health !' cried one. 'You speak like a true knight.'

'And he looks the man to keep his word, I'll warrant him,' spoke another.

'He does,' said Pery, shaking his head : 'nevertheless, if anything could have been done, sir, be sure we would have done it but all our armed men are scattered up and down the country, each taking care, as is natural, of his own cattle and his own women. There are not ten men-at-arms in Bourne this night ; and what is worse, sir, as



you may guess, who seem to have known war as well as I, there is no man to lead them.'

Here Hereward was on the point of saying, 'And what if I led you?'—on the point, too, of discovering himself. but he stopped short.

Was it fair to involve this little knot of gallant fellows in what might be a hopeless struggle, and to have all Bourne burned over their heads ere morning by the ruffian Frenchmen? No; his mother's quarrel was his own private quarrel. He would go alone and see the strength of the enemy; and after that, may be, he would raise the country on them: or—and half a dozen plans suggested themselves to his crafty brain as he sat brooding and scheming; then, as always, utterly self-confident

He was startled by a burst of noise outside—music, laughter, and shouts

'There,' said Pery bitterly, 'are those Frenchmen, dancing and singing in the hall, with my Lord Godwin's head above them!' And curses bitter and deep went round the room. They sat sullen and silent it may be for an hour or more: only moving when, at some fresh outbreak of revelry, the old man started from his doze and asked if that was Hereward coming.

'And who is this Hereward of whom you speak?' said Hereward at last.

'We thought you might know him, sir knight, if you come from Flanders, as you say you do,' said three or four voices in a surprised and surly tone.

'Certainly I know such a man; if he be Hereward the wolf's head, Hereward the outlaw, Hereward the Wake, as they call him. And a good soldier he is, though he be not yet made a knight; and married, too, to a rich and fair lady. I served under this Hereward a few months ago in the Zealand war, and know no man whom I would sooner follow.'

'Nor I either,' chimed in Martin Lightfoot from the other end of the table.

'Nor we,' cried all the men-at arms at once, each vying

with the other in extravagant stories of their hero's prowess, and in asking the knight of Flanders whether they were true or not.

To avoid offending them, Hereward was forced to confess to a great many deeds which he had never done: but he was right glad to find that his fame had reached his native place, and that he could count on the men if he needed them.

'But who is this Hereward,' said he, 'that he should have to do with your town here?'

Half a dozen voices at once told him his own story.

'I always heard,' said he drily, 'that that gentleman was of some very noble kin; and I will surely tell him all that has befallen here as soon as I return to Flanders.'

*Querulous whine.* A complaining murmur.

*Quest.* A search.

*Novice.* A beginner; one unskilled.

*Ruffles and roysters.* Swaggers, and behaves disgracefully.

## CHAPTER XXVIII

### HOW HEReward CLEARED BOURNE OF FRENCHMEN (3)

At last they grew sleepy. The men went out and brought in bundles of sweet sedge, spread them against the wall, and prepared to lie down, each with his weapon by his side. But when they were lain down, Hereward beckoned to him Pery and Martin Lightfoot, and went out into the back yard, under the pretence of seeing to his horse.

'Pery Surturbrandsson,' said he, 'thou seemest to be an honest man, as we in foreign parts hold all the Danelagh folk to be. Now it is fixed in my mind to go up, and my servant with me, to yon hall, and see what those French upstarts are about. Wilt thou trust me to go, without my fleeing back here if I am found out, or in any way bringing thee to harm by mixing thee up in my private matters?'

And wilt thou, if I do not come back, keep for thine own the horse which is in thy stable, and give moreover this purse and this ring to thy lady, if thou canst find means to see her face to face.'

As Hereward had spoken with some slight emotion, he had dropped unawares his assumed Flemish accent, and had spoken in broad burly Lincolnshire; and therefore it was that Pery, who had been staring at him by the moonlight all the while, said, when he was done, tremblingly—

'Either you are Hereward, or you are his double-ganger. You speak like Hereward, you look like Hereward. Just what Hereward would be now, you are. You are, my lord, whom men call Wake; and you cannot deny it.'

'Pery, if thou knowest me, speak of me to no living soul, save to thy lady my mother; and let me and my serving-man go free out of thy yard gate. If I ask thee before morning to open it again to me, thou wilt know that there is not a Frenchman left in the Hall of Bourne'

Pery threw his arms round him, and embraced him silently.

'Get me only,' said Hereward, 'some long woman's gear and black mantle, if thou canst, to cover this bright armour of mine.'

Pery went off in silence as one stunned; brought the mantle, and let them out of the yard gate. In ten minutes more, the two had waded the Water-gang, scrambled the dyke and its palisade, and stood under the gable of the great hall. Not a soul was stirring outside. The serfs were all cowering in their huts like so many rabbits in their burrows, listening in fear to the revelry of their new tyrants. The night was dark: but not so dark that Hereward could not see between him and the sky his brother's long locks floating in the breeze.

'That I must have down, at least,' said he, in a low voice.

'Then here is wherewithal,' said Martin Lightfoot, as he stumbled over something. 'The drunken villains have left the ladder in the yard.'

Hereward raised the ladder, took down the head, and

wrapped it in the cloak; and ere he did so, he kissed the cold forehead. How he had hated that boy! Well, at least he had never wilfully harmed him—or the boy him either, for that matter. And now he had died like a man, killing his foe. He was of the true old blood after all. And Hereward felt that he would have given all that he had, save his wife or his sword-hand, to have that boy alive again, to pet him, and train him, and teach him to fight at his side.

Then he slipped round to one of the narrow unshuttered windows and looked in. The hall was in a wasteful blaze of light; a whole month's candles burning in one night. The table was covered with all his father's choicest plate, the wine was running waste upon the floor; the men were lolling at the table in every stage of drunkenness; and at the table-head, most drunk of all, sat, in Earl Leofric's seat, the new Lord of Bourne.

Hereward could scarce believe his eyes. He was none other than Gilbert of Ghent's stout Flemish cook, whom he had seen many a time in Scotland. Hereward turned from the window in disgust: and slipping down to Martin, led him round the house.

'Now then, down with the ladder quick, and dash in the door. I go in: stay thou outside. If any man passes me, see that he pass not thee.'

Martin chuckled a ghostly laugh as he helped the ladder down. In another moment the door was burst in, and Hereward stood upon the threshold. He gave one war-shout of—A Wake! A Wake! and then rushed forward.

And then began a murder grim and great. They fought with ale-cups, with knives, with benches but, drunken and unarmed, they were hewn down like sheep. Fifteen Normans were in the hall when Hereward burst in. When the sun rose there were fifteen heads upon the gable. Escape had been impossible. Martin had laid the ladder across the door; and the few who escaped the master's terrible sword stumbled over it, to be brained by the man's not less terrible axe.



And then began a murder grim and great.—Page 121.

Then Hereward took up his brother's head, and went in to his mother.

The women in the bower opened to him. They had seen all that passed from the gallery above, which, as usual, hidden by a curtain, enabled the women to watch unseen what passed in the hall below.

The Lady Godiva sat crouched together, all but alone—for her bower-maidens had fled or been carried off long since—upon a low stool beside a long dark thing covered with a pall. So utterly crushed was she, that she did not even lift up her head as Hereward entered.

He placed his ghastly burden reverently beneath the pall, and then went and knelt before his mother.

For a while neither spoke a word. Then the Lady Godiva suddenly drew back her hood, and dropping on her knees, threw her arms round Hereward's neck, and wept till she could weep no more.

'Blessed strong arms,' sobbed she at last, 'around me! To feel something left in the world to protect me; something left in the world which loves me'

'You forgive me, mother?'

'You forgive me? It was I, I who was in fault—I, who should have cherished you, my strongest, my bravest, my noblest—now my all.'

And so she sobbed on, like any child.

*Double-ganger.* Ghost.

*Palisade* Strong palings for purposes of defence.

*Cowering.* Hiding in terror.

*Plate.* Silver implements for the table.

*Grim.* Terrible.

## CHAPTER XXIX

### HOW HEReward SENT ROUND THE WAR-ARROW

A WILD night was that in Bourne. All the folk, free and unfree, man and woman, were out on the streets, asking the

meaning of those terrible shrieks, followed by a more terrible silence.

At last Hereward strode down from the hall, his drawn sword in his hand.

‘Silence, good folks, and hearken to me, once and for all. There is not a Frenchman left alive in Bourne. If you be the men I take you for, there shall not be one left alive between Wash and Humber. Silence, again!’—as a fierce cry of rage and joy arose, and men rushed forward to take him by the hand, women to embrace him. ‘This is no time for compliments, good folks, but for quick wit and quick blows. For the law we fight, if we do fight, and by the law we must work, fight or not. Where is the lawman of the town?’

‘I was lawman last night, to see such law done as there is left,’ said Pery. ‘But you are lawman now. Do as you will. We will obey you.’

‘You shall be our lawman,’ shouted many voices

‘I? Who am I? Out-of-law, and a wolf’s head.’

‘We will put you back into your law,—we will give you your lands in full husting.’

‘Never mind a husting on my behalf. Let us have a husting, if we have one, for a better end and a bigger than that. Now, men of Bourne, I have put the coal in the bush. Dare you blow the fire till the forest is aflame from south to north? I have fought a dozen of Frenchmen. Dare you fight against Ivo and Gilbert of Ghent, with William Duke of Normandy at their back? Or will you take me, here as I stand, and give me up to them as an outlaw and a robber, to feed the crows outside the gates of Lincoln? Do it, if you will. It will be the wiser plan, my friends. Give me up to be judged and hanged; and so purge yourselves of the villainous murder of Gilbert’s cook—your late lord and master.’

‘Lord and master? We are free men!’ shouted the holders, or yeomen gentlemen. ‘We hold our lands from God and the sun.’

'You are our lord,' shouted the socmen, or tenants. Who but you? We will follow, if you will lead.'

'Hereward is come home!' cried a feeble voice behind. Let me come to him. Let me feel him.'

And through the crowd, supported by two ladies, uttered the mighty form of Surturbrand the blind Viking.

'Hereward is come,' cried he, as he folded his master's on in his arms. 'Ahoi' he is wet with blood! 'Ahoi! e smells of blood! 'Ahoi' the ravens will grow fat now, or Hereward is come home!'

Some would have led the old man away but he thrust them off fiercely.

'Ahoi! come wolf! Ahoi! come kite! Ahoi! come rne from off the fen! You followed us, and we fed you well, when Swend Forkbeard brought us over the sea. Follow us now, and we will feed you better still, with the longrel Frenchers who scoff at the tongue of their forefathers, and would rob their nearest kinsman of land and lass. Ahoi! Swend's men! Ahoi! Canute's men! 'Vikings' sons, sea-cocks' sons, Berserker's sons all! Split p the war-arrow, and send it round and the curse of Odin on every man that will not pass it on! A war-king o-morrow, and Hildur's game next day, that the old Surturbrand may fall like a free holder, axe in hand, and ot die like a cow in the straw which the Frenchman has pared him.'

All men were silent, as the old Viking's voice, cracked and feeble when he began, gathered strength from rage, till it rang through the still night air like a trumpet blast.

The silence was broken by a long wild cry from the forest, which made the women start, and catch their children closer to them. It was the howl of a wolf.

'Hark to the witch's horse! Hark to the son of Fenris, now he calls for meat! Are ye your father's sons, ye men of Bourne? They never let the gray beast call in vain.'

Hereward saw his opportunity, and seized it.

'The Viking is right! So speaks the spirit of our fathers; and we must show ourselves their true sons.



Send round the war-arrow, and death to the man who does not pass it on! Better die bravely together than falter and part company, to be hunted down one by one by men who will never forgive us as long as we have an acre of land for them to seize. Pery, son of Surturbrand, you are the lawman. Put it to the vote''

'Send round the war-arrow,' shouted Pery himself; and if there was a man or two who shrank from the proposal, they found it prudent to shout as loudly as did the rest.

Ere the morning light, the war-arrow was split into four splinters, and carried out, through the whole district of Kesteven. If the splinter were put into the house-father's hand, he must send it on at once to the next freeman's house. If he were away, it was stuck into his house-door, or into his great chair by the fireside, and woe to him if, on his return, he sent it not on likewise. All through Kesteven went that night the arrow-splinters, and with them the whisper, 'The Wake is come again'; till, before mid-day, there were fifty well-armed men in the old camping-field outside the town, and Hereward haranguing them in words of fire.

A chill came over them, nevertheless, when he told them that he must at once return to Flanders.

'But it must be,' he said. He had promised his good lord and sovereign, Baldwin of Flanders, and his word of honour he must keep. Two visits he must pay ere he went; and then to sea. But within the year, if he were alive on ground, he would return, and with him ships and men, it might be with Sweyn and all the power of Denmark. Only let them hold their own till the Danes should come, and all would be well. So would they show that they were free Englishmen, able to hold England against Frenchmen and all strangers. And whenever he came back he would set a light to Toft, Manthorpe, and Witham-on-the-hill. They were his own farms, or should have been; and better they should burn than Frenchmen hold them. They could be seen far and wide

over the Bruneswald and over all the fen: and then all men might know for sure that the Wake was come again.

Then they went down to the water and took barge, and laid the corpse therein; and Godiva and Hereward sat at the dead lad's head.

And they rowed away for Crowland, by many a mere and many an ea; through narrow reaches of clear brown glassy water; between the dark-green alders; between the pale-green reeds; where the coot clanked, and the bittern boomed, and the sedge-bird, not content with its own sweet song, mocked the notes of all the birds around; and then out into the broad lagoons, where hung motionless, high over head, hawk beyond hawk, buzzard beyond buzzard, kite beyond kite, as far as eye could see. Into the air, as they rowed on, whirred up great skeins of wild fowl innumerable, with a cry as of all the bells of Crowland, or all the hounds of the Bruneswald; while clear above all their noise sounded the wild whistle of the curlews, and the trumpet note of the great white swan. Out of the reeds, like an arrow, shot the peregrine, singled one luckless mallard from the flock, caught him up, struck him stone dead with one blow of his terrible heel, and swept his prey with him into the reeds again.

*Free and unfree.* Landowners and serfs.-

*Husting.* ~~The assembly of the freemen.~~

*Lincoln.* The city had been taken by William in 1069, and was held for him by Gilbert of Ghent.

*Purge.* Clear away thoroughly.

*Erne.* The golden eagle.

*Mongrel.* Of a mixed breed; ill-born.

*Svend Forkbeard.* King of Denmark and Sweden, who invaded England in 994. He was practically King of England in 1013, but was never crowned. He was the father of Canute.

*Hildur.* The goddess of war worshipped by the Northmen.

*Fenris.* A demon wolf in whom the Northmen believed.

*Harangung.* Addressing vigorously.

*Ea.* The reach of a river.

*Peregrine.* The black hawk or falcon.

*Mallard.* A wild duck.

## CHAPTER XXX

HOW HEReward WAS MADE A KNIGHT AFTER THE  
FASHION OF THE ENGLISH (1)

AND thus they glided on from stream to stream, until at last they came to Crowland minster: a vast range of high-peaked buildings, founded on piles of oak and alder driven into the fen—itself built almost entirely of timber from the Bruneswald; barns, granaries, stables, workshops, stranger's hall, fit for the boundless hospitality of Crowland; infirmary, refectory, dormitory, library, abbot's lodgings, cloisters; with the great minster towering up, a steep pile, half wood, half stone, with narrow round-headed windows, and leaden roofs, and, above all, the great wooden tower, from which, on high days, chimed out the melody of the seven famous bells, which had not their like in English land

They went into the great courtyard. All men were quiet, yet all men were busy; baking and brewing, carpentering and tailoring, in the workshops; reading and writing in the cloister; praying and singing in the church; and teaching the children in the schoolhouse.

So while the world outside raged, and fought, and conquered, and plundered, they within the holy isle kept up some sort of order, and justice, and usefulness, and love to God and man. And about the yards, among the feet of the monks, hopped the sacred ravens, descendants of those who brought back the gloves at St. Guthlac's bidding; and overhead, under all the eaves, built the sacred swallows, the descendants of those who sat and sang upon St. Guthlac's shoulders; and when men marvelled thereat, he the holy man replied, 'Know that they who live the holy life draw nearer to the birds of the air, even as they do to the angels in heaven.'

And Lady Godiva called for old Abbot Ulfketyl, the good and brave; and fell upon his neck, and told him all

her tale ; and Ulfketyl wept upon her neck. for they were old and faithful friends.

And they passed into the dark cool church, and there in the nave they buried the lad Godwin, with chant and dirge ; and when the funeral was done, Hereward went up toward the high altar, and bade Winter and Gwenoch come with him. And there he knelt, and vowed a vow to God and St. Guthlac and the Lady Torfrida his true love, never to leave from slaying while there was a Frenchman left alive on English ground.

And Godiva and Ulfketyl heard his vow, and shuddered ; but they dared not stop him, for they too had English hearts.

And Winter and Gwenoch heard it, and repeated it word for word.

Then he kissed his mother, and called Winter and Gwenoch, and went forth. He would be back again, he said, on the third day.

Then those three went to Peterborough, and asked for Abbot Brand. And the monks let them in ; for the fame of their deed had passed through the forest, and all the French had fled.

And old Brand lay back in his great armchair, his legs all muffled up in furs, for he could get no heat ; but when he saw Hereward come in, he cast the mufflers off him, and sprang up from his chair, and was young and strong in a moment, and for a moment.

And he threw his arms round Hereward, and wept upon his neck, as his mother had done. And Hereward wept upon his neck, though he had not wept upon his mother's.

Then Brand held him at arms' length, or thought he held him ; for he was leaning on Hereward, and tottering all the while ; and extolled him as the champion, the warrior, the stay of his house, the avenger of his kin, the hero of whom he had always prophesied that his kin would need him, and that then he would not fail.

But Hereward answered him modestly and mildly :

'Speak not so to me and of me, uncle Brand. I am a

very foolish, vain, sinful man, who have come through great adventures, I know not how, to great and strange happiness: and now again to great and strange sorrows. Therefore make me not proud, uncle Brand, but keep me modest and lowly, as befits all true knights and penitent sinners; for they tell me that God resists the proud, and giveth grace to the humble. And I have that to do which do I cannot, unless God and His saints give me grace from this day forth.'

Brand looked at him, astonished, and then turned to Herluin the prior.

'Did I not tell thee, prior? This is the lad whom you called graceless and a savage; and see, since he has been in foreign lands, and seen the ways of knights, he talks as clerkly as a Frenchman, and as piously as any monk.'

'The Lord Hereward,' said Herluin, 'has doubtless learned much from the manners of our nation which he would not have learned in England. I rejoice to see him returned so Christian and so courtly a knight.'

'The Lord Hereward, Prior Herluin, has learnt one thing in his travels—to know somewhat of men and the hearts of men, and to deal with them as they deserve of him. They tell me that one Thorold of Malmesbury—Thorold of Fécamp, the minstrel—that he desires this abbey.'

'I have so heard, my lord.'

'Then I command—I, Hereward, Lord of Bourne—that this abbey be held against him and all Frenchmen, in the name of Sweyn Ulfsson, King of England, and of me. And he that admits a Frenchman therein, I will shave his crown for him so well, that he shall never need razor more. This I tell thee; and this I shall tell thy monks before I go. And unless you obey the same, my dream will be fulfilled; and you will see Goldenborough in a light low, and yourselves burning in the midst thereof.'

'Sweyn Ulfsson? Sweyn of Denmark? What words are these?' cried Brand.

'You will know within six months, uncle.'

'I shall know better things, before six months are out.'

‘Uncle, uncle, do not say that.’

‘Why not? If this mortal life be at best a prison and a grave, what is it worth now to an Englishman?’

‘More than ever, for never had an Englishman such a chance of showing English mettle, and winning renown for the English name. Uncle, you must do something for me and my comrades ere we go.’

‘Well, boy?’

‘Make us knights.’

‘Knights, lad? I thought you had been a belted knight this dozen years?’

‘I might have been made a knight by many, after the French fashion, many a year ago. Something kept me from it. Perhaps’ (with a glance at Herluin) ‘I wanted to show that an English squire could be the rival and the leader of French and Flemish knights.’

‘And thou hast shown it, brave lad,’ said Brand, clapping his great hands.

‘Perhaps I longed to do some mighty deed at last, which would give me a right to go to the bravest knight in all Christendom, and say, Give me the accolade, then! Thou only art worthy to knight as good a man as thyself.’

‘Pride and vainglory,’ said Brand, shaking his head.

‘But now I am of a sounder mind. I see now why I was kept from being knighted—till I had done a deed worthy of a true knight; till I had mightily avenged the wronged, and mightily succoured the oppressed; till I had purged my soul of my enmity against my own kin, and could go out into the world a new man, with my mother’s blessing on my head.’

‘But not of the robbery of St. Peter,’ said Herluin. The French monk wanted not for moral courage: no French monk did in those days. And he proved it by those words.

‘Do not anger the lad, prior; now, too, above all times, when his heart is softened towards the Lord.’

‘He has not angered me. The man is right. Here, lord abbot and sir prior, is a chain of gold, won in the

wars. It is worth fifty times the sixteen pence which I stole, and which I repaid double. Let St. Peter take it, for the sins of me and my two comrades, and forgive. And now, sir prior, I do to thee what I never did for mortal man. I kneel and ask thy forgiveness. Kneel, Winter! Kneel, Gwenoch!" And Hereward knelt.

*Refectory.* A great hall for eating.

*St. Guthlac.* The son of a nobleman of Mercia. He was born towards the end of the seventh century, and after some years of a wild freebooter's life, became suddenly converted, and retired to a desolate island in the heart of the fenland, known as Crowland or Croyland, from the multitude of crows and other wild birds existing there. In this spot he lived a hermit's life for many years; the great Abbey of Croyland being built after his death, upon the site of his cell.

*Winter and Gwenoch.* Hereward's faithful comrades.

*Estold.* Praised.

*Ulfketill.* A monk of Peterborough, who was made Abbot of Crowland in 1062 and deposed in 1086.

*Fecamp.* A town in Normandy.

*Dirge.* A funeral song.

## CHAPTER XXXI

### HOW HEREWARD WAS MADE A KNIGHT AFTER THE FASHION OF THE ENGLISH (2)

HERLUIN was of double mind. He longed to keep Hereward out of St. Peter's grace. He longed to see Hereward dead at his feet: not because of any personal hatred, but because he foresaw in him a terrible foe to the Norman cause. But he wished, too, to involve Abbot Brand as much as possible in Hereward's rebellions and misdeeds, and above all, in the master-offence of knighting him; for for that end, he saw, Hereward was come. Moreover, he was touched with the sudden frankness and humility of the famous champion. So he answered mildly—

‘Verily, thou hast a knightly soul. May God and St. Peter so forgive thee and thy companions as I forgive thee, freely and from my heart.’

‘Now,’ cried Hereward; ‘a boon! A boon! Knight me and these my fellows, uncle Brand, this day.’

Brand was old and weak; and looked at Herluin.

‘I know,’ said Hereward, ‘that the French look on us English monk-made knights as spurious, unworthy of the name of knight. But, I hold—and what churchman will gainsay me?—that it is nobler to receive sword and belt from a man of God than from a man of blood like one’s self; for the fittest man to consecrate the soldier of an earthly king is the soldier of Christ the King of kings.’

‘He speaks well,’ said Herluin. ‘Abbot, grant him his boon.’

‘Who celebrates high mass to-morrow?’

‘Wilton the priest, the monk of Ely,’ said Herluin, aloud. ‘And a very dangerous and stubborn Englishman,’ added he to himself.

‘Good. Then this night you shall watch in the church. To-morrow, after the Gospel, the thing shall be done as you will.’

The next morning, before the high mass, those three brave men walked up to the altar; laid thereon their belts and swords; and then knelt humbly at the foot of the steps till the Gospel was finished.

Then came down from the altar Wilton of Ely, and laid on each man’s bare neck the bare blade, and bade him take back his sword in the name of God and of St. Peter and St. Paul, and use it like a true knight, for a terror and punishment to evil-doers, and a defence for women and orphans, and the poor and the oppressed, and the monks the servants of God.

And then the monks girded each man with his belt and sword once more. And after mass was sung, they rose, each feeling himself—and surely not in vain—a better man.

At least this is certain, that Hereward would say to his dying day, how he had often proved that none would fight



so well as those who had received their sword from God's knights the monks. Therefore he would have, in after years, almost all his companions knighted by the monks, and he brought into Ely with him that same good custom which he had learnt at Peterborough, and kept it up as long as he held the isle.

Then he said—

'Have you monks a limner here, who can paint for me?'

'That can I,' said Wilton of Ely.

'Then take my shield, and raze from it this bear which I carry.'

Wilton brought pencil and paint, and did so.

'Now, paint me in a W, that shall stand for Wake, and make it—make it out of the knots of a monk's girdle, for a sign that I am a monk's knight, and not a king's, and that I am the champion of the monks of England against the monks of France, from this time forth for evermore.'

Wilton did it; and made out of two monks' girdles none other than the after-famous Wake knot.

'Now do the same by Winter and Gwenoch's shields. Monks' knights are we, and monks' battles we will fight.'

'You must have a motto to match withal, my good lord,' said Wilton, throwing his English heart into the work.

'What better than my own name—Wake? These are times in which good Englishmen must not sleep—and sleep I will not, trust me; nor mine either.'

'Vigila, that will be in Latin.'

'Ay—let us have Latin; and show these Frenchmen that we are clerks and gentlemen, as well as they.'

'Vigila . . . et Ora,' said the monk solemnly, 'Watch and pray; lest thou enter into temptation.'

'Watch—and pray. Thou speakest like a man of God,' said Hereward, half sadly. 'Thou hast said so be it. God knows, I have need of that, too, if only I knew how. But I will watch, and my wife shall pray; and so will the work be well parted between us.'

And so was born the Wake motto and the Wake knot.

It was late when they got back to Crowland. The good abbot received them with a troubled face.

‘As I feared, my lord, you have been too hot and hasty. The French have raised the country against you.’

‘I have raised it against them, my lord.’

‘But we have news that Sir Frederick——’

‘And who may he be?’

‘A very terrible Goliath of these French; old and crafty, and he has sworn to have your life, and has gathered knights and men-at-arms at Lynn in Norfolk.’

‘Very good; I will visit him as I go home, lord abbot. Not a word of this to any soul.’

‘I tremble for thee, thou young David.’

‘One cannot live for ever, my lord. Farewell.’

A week after a boatman brought news to Crowland how Sir Frederick was sitting in his inn at Lynn, when there came in one with a sword, and said, ‘I am Hereward the Wake. I was told that thou didst desire greatly to see me; therefore I am come, being a courteous knight,’ and herewith smote off his head. And when the knights and others would have stopped him, he cut his way through them, killing some three or four at each stroke, himself unhurt; for he was clothed from head to foot in magic armour, and whosoever smote it, their swords melted in their hands. And so gaining the door, he vanished in a great cloud of sea-fowl, that cried for ever ‘The Wake is come again.’

And after that the fen-men said to each other, that all the birds upon the meres cried nothing save ‘The Wake is come again.’

And so, already surrounded with myth and mystery, Hereward flashed into the fens and out again, like the lightning brand, destroying as he passed. And the hearts of all the French were turned to water; and the land had peace from its tyrants for many days.

*Boon.* A gift or favour.

*Limner.* An artist.

*Raze.* Erase; wipe off.

{ *Goliath.* A famous giant of ancient days, slain by David.

*Myth.* Legend or story.

## CHAPTER XXXII

## HOW IVO TAILLEBOIS MARCHED OUT OF SPALDING TOWN

A PROUD man was Ivo Taillebois, as he rode next morning out of Spalding town, with hawk on fist, hound at heel, and a dozen men-at-arms at his back, who would, on due or undue cause shown, hunt men while he hunted game.

An adventurer from Anjou, brutal, ignorant, and profligate—low-born, too (for his own men whispered, behind his back, that he was no more than his name hinted, a wood-cutter's son), he still had his deserts. Valiant he was, cunning, and skilled in war. He and his troop of Angevine ruttiers had fought like tigers by William's side at Hastings; and he had been rewarded with many a manor which had been Earl Algar's, and should now have been Earl Edwin's, or Morcar's, or, it may be, Hereward's own.

As he rode out of Spalding town, a man was being hanged on the gallows there permanently provided.

That was so common a sight, that Ivo would not have stopped, had not a priest, who was comforting the criminal, run forward and almost thrown himself under the horse's feet.

'Mercy, good my lord, in the name of God and all his saints.'

Ivo went to ride on.

'Mercy!' and he laid hands on Ivo's bridle. 'If he took a few pike out of your mere, remember that the mere was his, and his father's before him, and do not send a sorely tempted soul out of the world for a paltry fish.'

'And where am I to get fish for Lent, sir priest, if every rascal nets my waters, because his father did so before him? Take your hand off my bridle, or I will hew it off'

The priest looked at him, with something of honest fierceness in his eyes; and dropping the bridle, muttered to himself in Latin: 'The bloodthirsty and deceitful man'

shall not live out half his days. Nevertheless, my trust shall be in Thee, O Lord.'

'What art muttering, beast? Go home to thy wife and make the most of her, before I rout out thee and thy fellow-canons, and put in good monks from Normandy in the place of your drunken English swine. Hang him!' shouted he, as the bystanders fell on their knees before the tyrant, crouching in terror, every woman for her husband, every man for wife and daughter. 'And hearken, you fen-frogs all. Whoso touches pike or eel, swimming or wading fowl, within these meres of mine without my leave, I will hang him as I hanged this man; as I hanged four brothers in a row on Wrokesham Bridge but last week.'

'Go to Wrokesham Bridge and see,' shouted a shrill cracked voice from behind the crowd.

All looked round; and more than one of Ivo's men set up a yell, the hangman loudest of all.

'That's he, the heron again! Catch him! Stop him! Shoot him!'

But that was not so easy. As Ivo pushed his horse through the crowd, careless of whom he crushed, he saw a long lean figure flying through the air seven feet aloft, his heels higher than his head, on the farther side of a deep broad ditch; and, on the nearer side of the same, one of his best men lying stark, with a cloven skull.

'Go to Wrokesham!' shrieked the lean man, as he rose, and showed a ridiculously long nose, neck, and legs (a type still not uncommon in the fens), a quilted leather coat, a double-bladed axe slung over his shoulder by a thong, a round shield at his back, and a pole three times as long as himself, which he dragged after him, like an unwieldy tail.

'The heron, the heron!' shouted the English.

'Follow him, men, heron or hawk!' shouted Ivo, galloping his horse up to the ditch, and stopping short at fifteen feet of water.

'Shoot, some one! Where are the bows gone?'

The heron was away two hundred yards, running, in spite of his pole, at a wonderful pace, before a bow could be brought to bear. He seemed to expect an arrow, for he stopped, glanced his eye round, threw himself flat on his face, with his shield, not over his body, but over his bare legs; sprang up as the shaft stuck in the ground beside him; ran on; planted his pole in the next dyke, and flew over it.

In a few minutes he was beyond pursuit, and Ivo turned, breathless with rage, to ask who he was.

‘Alas, sir, he is the man who set free the four men at Wrokesham Bridge last week.’

‘Set free! Are they not hanged and dead?’

‘We—we dare not tell you. But he came upon us——’

‘Single-handed, you cowards?’

‘Sir, he is not a man, but a witch or a devil. He asked us what we did there. One of our men laughed at his long neck and legs, and called him Heron. “Heron I am,” says he, “and strike like a heron, right at the eyes,” and with that he cuts the man over the face with his axe, and laid him dead, and then another and another’

‘Till you all ran away, villains.’

‘We gave back a step—no more. And he freed one of those four, and he again the rest; and then they all set on us, and went to hang us in their own stead’

‘When there were ten of you, I thought.’

‘Sir, as we told you, he is no mortal man but a fiend.’

‘Beasts, fools. Well, I have hanged this one, at least!’ growled Ivo, and then rode sullenly on.

A pretty lass came along the drove, driving a few sheep before her, and spinning as she walked.

‘Whose lass are you?’ shouted Ivo.

‘The abbot’s of Crowland, please your lordship,’ said she, trembling.

‘Much too pretty to belong to monks. Chuck her up behind you, one of you.’

The shrieking and struggling girl was mounted behind a horseman, and bound : and Ivo rode on.

A woman ran out of a turf-hut on the drove side, attracted by the girl's cries. It was her mother.

'My lass' Give me my lass, for the love of St. Mary and all saints.' And she clung to Ivo's bridle.

He struck her down, and rode on over her.

A man cutting sedges in a punt in the lode alongside looked up at the girl's shrieks, and leapt on shore, scythe in hand.

'Father' father'' cried she.

'I'll rid thee, lass, or die for it,' said he, as he sprang up the drove-dyke, and swept right and left at the horses' legs.

The men recoiled. One horse went down, lamed for life; another staggered backwards into the farther lode, and was drowned. But an arrow went through the brave serf's heart, and Ivo rode on, cursing more bitterly than ever, and comforted himself by flying his hawks at a covey of partridges.

So they rode back. Two hours after, the girl was found on the road, dead.

*Anjou* A province of France.

*Profligate.* Leading an immoral life.

*No more than his name hinted.* Taille-bois may be taken as the

Norman-French for cutter of wood

*Deserts.* What he deserved.

*Valiant.* Brave.

*Angervinc.* From Anjou.

*Rutriers.* A horseman; a rider.

*Mere.* A lake.

*Paltry* Of little value.

*Lode* A water-course

*Rid.* Free.

*Covey.* A brood.

## CHAPTER XXXIII

## HOW HEREWARD SAILED FOR ENGLAND

[Hereward went back to Flanders, and at last, after many negotiations and delays, it was agreed that the Danes should furnish a fleet and men; and help the English to win back England from the Normans.]

At last Hereward's time came. Martin Lightfoot ran in, breathless, to tell how the sails of a mighty fleet were visible from the Dunes.

'Here?' cried Hereward. 'What are the fools doing down here, wandering into the very jaws of the wolf? How will they land here? They were to have gone straight to the Lincolnshire coast. God grant this mistake be not the first of dozens!'

Hereward went into Torfrida's bower.

'This is an evil business. The Danes are here, where they have no business, instead of being off Scheldtmouth, as I entreated them. But go we must, or be for ever shamed. Now, true wife, are you ready? Dare you leave home, and kin, and friends, once and for all, to go, you know not whither, with one who may be a gory corpse by this day week?'

'I dare,' said she.

So they went down the Aa by night, with Torfrida's mother, and the child, and all their jewels, and all they had in the world. And their housecarles went with them, forty men, tried and trained, who had vowed to follow Hereward round the world. And there were two long-ships ready, and twenty good mariners in each. So when the Danes made the South Foreland the next morning, they were aware of two gallant ships bearing down on them, with a strange knot embroidered on their sails.

A proud man was Hereward that day, as he sailed into the midst of the Danish fleet, and up to the royal ships, and shouted—

'I am Hereward the Wake, and I come to take service under my rightful lord, Sweyn, King of England.

'Come on board, then; well do we know you, and right glad we are to have The Wake with us.'

And Hereward laid his ship's bow upon the quarter of the royal ship (to lay alongside was impossible, for fear of breaking oars), and came on board.

'And thou art Hereward?' asked a tall and noble warrior.

'I am. And thou art Sweyn Ulfsson, the king?'

'I am Jarl Asbiorn, his brother.'

'Then where is the king?'

'He is in Denmark, and I command his fleet; and with me Canute and Harold, Sweyn's sons, and jarls and bishops enough for all England.'

This was spoken in a somewhat haughty tone, in answer to the look of surprise and disappointment which Hereward had, unawares, allowed to pass over his face.

'Thou art better than none,' said Hereward. 'Now, hearken, Asbiorn the jarl. Had Sweyn been here, I would have put my hand between his, and said in my own name, and that of all the men in Kesteven and the fens, Sweyn's men we are, to live and die! But now, as it is, I say for me and them, thy men we are, to live and die, as long as thou art true to us.'

'True to you I will be,' said Asbiorn.

'Be it so,' said Hereward. 'True we shall be, whatever betide. Now, whither goes Jarl Asbiorn, and all his great company?'

'We purpose to try Dover.'

'You will not take it. The Frenchman has strengthened it with one of his accursed keeps, and without battering engines you may sit before it a month.'

'What if I ask you to go in thither yourself, and try the mettle and the luck which, they say, never failed Hereward yet?'

'I should say that it was a child's trick to throw away against a paltry stone wall the life of a man who was



ready to raise for you, in Lincolnshire and Cambridgeshire, five times as many men as you will lose in taking Dover.'

'Hereward is right,' said more than one jarl. 'We shall need him in his own country.'

'If you are wise, to that country you yourselves will go. It is ready to receive you. This is ready to oppose you. You are attacking the Frenchman at his strongest point, instead of his weakest. Did I not send again and again, entreating you to cross from Scheldtmouth to the Wash, and send me word that I might come and raise the Fen-men for you, and then we would all go north together?'

'I have heard, ere now,' said Asbiorn haughtily, 'that Hereward, though he be a valiant Viking, is more fond of giving advice than of taking it.'

Hereward was about to answer very fiercely. If he had, no one would have thought any harm, in those plain-spoken times. But he was wise, and restrained himself, remembering that Torfrida was there, all but alone, in the midst of a fleet of savage men; and that beside, he had a great deed to do, and must do it as he could. So he answered—

'Asbiorn the jarl has not, it seems, heard this of Hereward. that because he is accustomed to command, he is also accustomed to obey. What thou wilt do, do, and bid me do. He that quarrels with his captain, cuts his own throat and his fellows' too.'

'Wisely spoken!' said the jarls; and Hereward went back to his ship.

'Torfrida,' said he bitterly, 'the game is lost before it is begun.'

'God forbid, my beloved! What words are these?'

'Sweyn—fool that he is with his over-caution—always the same—has let the prize slip from between his fingers. He has sent Asbiorn instead of himself'

'But why is that so terrible a mistake?'

'We do not want a fleet of Vikings in England, to blunder the French and English alike. We want a king,

a king, a king ' and Hereward stamped with rage. ' And instead of a king we have this Asbiorn—all men know him—greedy, and false, and weak-headed. Here he is going to be beaten off at Dover, and then, I suppose, at the next port; and so forth, till the whole season is wasted, and the ships and men lost by dribblets. Pray for us to God and His saints, Torfrida, you who are nearer to heaven than I; for we never needed it more.'

So Asbiorn went in: tried to take Dover; and was beaten off with heavy loss.

Then the jarls bade him take Hereward's advice. But he would not.

So he went round the Foreland, and tried Sandwich—as if, landing there, he would have been safe in marching on London, in the teeth of the pick of Normandy.

But he was beaten off there with more loss. Then, too late, he took Hereward's advice—or, rather, half of it—and sailed north: but only to commit more follies.

He dared not enter the Thames. He would not go on to the Wash; but he went into the Orwell, and attacked Ipswich, plundering right and left, instead of proclaiming King Sweyn, and calling the Danish folk around him. They naturally enough rose; and, like valiant men, beat him off, while Hereward lay outside the river mouth, his soul within him black with disappointment, rage, and shame. He would not go in. He would not fight against his own countrymen. He would not help to turn the whole plan into a marauding raid. And he told Jarl Asbiorn so, so fiercely, that his life would have been in danger, had not the force of his arm been as much feared as the force of his name was needed.

At last they came to Yarmouth. Asbiorn would needs land there, and try Norwich.

Hereward was nigh desperate, but he hit upon a plan. Let Asbiorn do so, if he would. He himself would sail round to the Wash, raise the Fen-men, and march eastward at their head through Norfolk to meet him. Asbiorn himself could not refuse so rational a proposal. All the

jarls and bishops approved loudly ; and away Hereward went to the Wash, his heart well-nigh broke, foreseeing nothing but evil.

*Dunes.* Low hills of sand.

*Jarl* An earl.

*Keeps.* Castles.

*Driblets.* Small portions.

*Marauding raid* An expedition of which the only purpose is plunder and robbery.

## CHAPTER XXXIV

### HOW HEREWARD GATHERED AN ARMY (1)

THE voyage round the Norfolk coast was rough and wild. Torfrida was ill ; the little girl was ill, the poor old mother was so ill that she could not even say her prayers. Packed uncomfortably under the awning on the poop, Torfrida looked on from beneath it upon the rolling water-waste, with a heart full of gloomy forebodings, and a brain whirling with wild fancies. The wreaths of cloud were gray witches, hurrying on with the ship to work her woe ; the low red storm-dawn was streaked with blood, the water which gurgled all night under the lee was alive with hoarse voices ; and again and again she started from fitful slumber to clasp the child closer to her, or look up for comfort to the sturdy figure of her husband, as he stood, like a tower of strength, steering and commanding, the long night through.

Yes ; on him she could depend. On his courage, on his skill. And as for his love, had she not that utterly ? and what more did woman need ?

But she was going, she scarce knew whither ; and she scarce knew for what. At least, on a fearful adventure, which might have a fearful end. But was it not her duty ? Him she loved, and his she was ; and him she must follow, over sea and land, till death ; and if possible,

beyond death again for ever. For his sake she would ~~slave~~ For his sake she would be strong. If ever there rose in her a home-sickness, a regret for leaving Flanders, and much more for that sunnier south where she was born, he at least should never be saddened or weakened by one hint of her sadness and weakness. And so it befell that, by the time they made the coast, she had altogether conquered all womanly softness.

And yet she shuddered at the dreary mud-creek into which they ran their ships, at the dreary flats on which they landed shivering, swept over by the keen north-east wind. A lonely land; and within, she knew not what of danger, it might be of hideous death.

But she would be strong; and when they were all landed, men, arms, baggage, and had pitched the tents which the wise Hereward had brought with them, she rose up like a queen, and took her little one by the hand, and went among the men, and spoke

‘Housecarles and mariners! You are following a great captain upon a great adventure. How great he is you know as well as I. I have given him myself, my wealth, and all I have; and have followed him I know not whither, because I trust him utterly. Men, trust him as I trust him, and follow him to the death.’

‘That we will!’

‘And men, I am here among you, a weak woman, trying to be brave for his sake—and for yours. Be true to me, too, as I have been true to you. For your sake have I worked hard, day and night, for many a year. For you I have baked, and brewed, and cooked, like any poor churl’s wife. Is there a garment on your backs which my hands have not mended? Is there a wound on your limbs which my hands have not salved? Oh, if Torfrida has been true to you, promise me this day that you will be true men to her and hers; that if—which Heaven forbid—ought should befall him and me, you will protect this my child, who has grown up amongst you all—a lamb brought up within the lion’s den. Look at her, men, and

promise me, on the faith of valiant soldiers, that you will be lions on her behalf, if she shall ever need you. Promise me, that if you have but one more stroke left to strike on earth, you will strike it to defend the daughter of Hereward and Torfrida from cruelty and shame'

The men answered with a shout which rolled along the fen, and startled the wild fowl up from far-off pools. They crowded round their lady; they kissed her hands; they bent down and kissed their little playmate; and swore—one by God and His apostles, and the next by Odin and Thor—that she should be a daughter to each and every one of them, as long as they could grip steel in hand.

Then Hereward sent on spies, to see whether the Frenchmen were in the land, and how folks fared at Holbeach, Spalding, and Bourne

The two young Siwards, as knowing the country and the folk, pushed forward, and with them Martin Lightfoot, to bring back news.

Martin ran back all the way from Holbeach, the very first day, with right good tidings. There was not a Frenchman in the town. Neither was there, they said, in Spalding. Ivo Taillebois was still away at the wars, and long might he stay.

So forward they marched, and everywhere the landsfolk were tilling the ground in peace; and when they saw that stout array, they hurried out to meet the troops, and burdened them with food, and ale, and all they needed.

And at Holbeach, and at Spalding, Hereward split up the war-arrow, and sent it through Kesteven, and south into the Cambridge fens, calling on all men to arm, and come to him at Bourne, in the name of Morcar the earl.

And at every farm and town he blew the war-horn, and summoned every man who could bear arms to be ready, against the coming of the Danish host from Norwich. And so through all the fens came true what the wild fowl said upon the meres, that The Wake was come again.

And when he came to Bourne, all men were tilling in

peace. The terror of The Wake had fallen on the Frenchmen, and no man had dared to enter on his inheritance, or to set a French foot over the threshold of that ghastly hall, above the gable whereof still grinned the fifteen heads; on the floor whereof still spread the dark stains of blood.

Then Hereward, as he had promised, set fire to the three farms close to the Brunewald; and all his outlawed friends, lurking in the forest, knew by that signal that Hereward was come again. So they cleansed out the old house, though they did not take down the heads from off the gable; and Torfrida went about the town, and about it, and confessed that England was after all a pleasant place enough. And they were as happy, it may be, for a week or two, as ever they had been in their lives.

Meanwhile went round through all the fens, and north into the Brunewald, and away again to Lincoln and merry Sherwood, that The Wake was come again. And Gilbert of Ghent, keeping Lincoln Castle for the Conqueror, was perplexed in mind, and looked well to gates, and bars, and sentinels; for Hereward sent him at once a message, that forasmuch as he had put a rascal cook into his mother's manors, he should ride Odin's horse on the highest ash in the Brunewald.

On which Gilbert of Ghent, inquiring what Odin's horse might be, and finding it to signify the ash tree whereon, as sacred to Odin, thieves were hanged by Danes and Norse, made answer:

That he Gilbert had not put his cook into Bourne, nor otherwise harmed Hereward or his. That Bourne had been seized by the king himself, together with Earl Morcar's lands in those parts, as all men knew. That the said cook so pleased the king with a dish of stewed eelpout, which he served up to him at Cambridge, and which the king had never eaten before, that the king begged the said cook of him Gilbert and took him away; and that after, so he heard, the said cook had begged the said manor of Bourne of the king, without the knowledge or

consent of him Gilbert. That he therefore knew nought of the matter. That if Hereward meant to keep the king's peace, he might live in Bourne till Doomsday, for aught he Gilbert cared: but that if he and his men meant to break the king's peace, and attack Lincoln city, he Gilbert would nail their skins to the door of Lincoln Cathedral, as they used to do by the heathen Danes in old time. And that, therefore, they now understood each other.

At which Hereward laughed, and said that they had done that for many a year.

*Salved* To dress with ointment, to heal.

*The two young Swards.* Hereward's nephews

*Hunked.* Hanged.

*Eel-pout.* The old English name for eels. So called because the fish has the power of inflating, or *pouting*, a membrane over its eyes.

## CHAPTER XXXV

### HOW HEREWARD GATHERED AN ARMY (2)

AND now poured into Bourne from every side brave men and true, some great holders dispossessed of their land, some the sons of holders who were not yet dispossessed, some Morcar's men, some Edwin's, who had been turned out by the king; and almost all of them, probably, blood relations of Hereward's, or of King Harold's, or of each other; of whom naught is known, save, in a few cases, from Domesday-book, the manors which they held. But honour to their very names. Honour to the last heroes of the old English race.

These valiant gentlemen, with the housecarles whom, more or fewer, they would bring with them, constituted a formidable force, as after years proved well. But having got his men, Hereward's first care was, doubtless, to teach them that art of war of which they, like true Englishmen, knew nothing.

The art of war has changed little, if at all, by the

introduction of gunpowder. The campaigns of Hannibal and Cæsar succeeded by the same tactics as those of Frederic and Wellington; and so, as far as we can judge, did those of the master-general of his age, William of Normandy.

But of those tactics the English knew nothing. Their armies were little more than tumultuous levies, in which men marched and fought under local leaders, often divided by local jealousies. The commissariats of the armies seem to have been so worthless that they had to plunder friends as well as foes as they went along; and with plunder came every sort of excess—as when the Northern men, marching down to meet Harold Godwinsson, and demand young Edwin as their earl, laid waste, seemingly out of mere brute wantonness, the country round Northampton, which must have been in Edwin's earldom, or at least in that of his brother Morcar. And even the local leaders were not over-well obeyed. The reckless spirit of personal independence, especially among the Anglo-Danes, prevented anything like discipline, or organised movement of masses, and made every battle degenerate into a confusion of single combats.

But Hereward had learned that art of war which enabled the French to crush piecemeal, with their inferior numbers, the vast but straggling levies of the English. His men, mostly outlaws and homeless, kept together by the pressure from without, and free from local jealousies, resembled an army of professional soldiers. And to the discipline which he instilled into them; to his ability in marching and manœuvring troops, to his care for their food and for their transport; possibly also to his training them in that art of fighting on horseback in which the men of Wessex, if not the Anglo-Danes of the East, are said to have been quite unskilled—in short, to all that he had learned as a mercenary under Robert the Frisian, and among the highly civilised warriors of Flanders and Normandy, must be attributed the fact that he and his little army defied for years the utmost efforts of the Frenchmen; appearing and



disappearing with such strange swiftness, and conquering against such strange odds, as enshrouded their captain in an atmosphere of myth and wonder, only to be accounted for, in the mind of French as well as English, by the supernatural counsels of his sorceress wife.

But Hereward grew anxious and more anxious as days and weeks went on, and yet there was no news of Asbiorn and his Danes at Norwich. Time was precious. He had to march his little army to the Wash, and then transport it by boats—no easy matter—to Lynn in Norfolk, as his nearest point of attack. So Hereward sent spies along the Ermine Street—the only road, then, toward the north-west of England—and spies northward along the Roman road to Lincoln. But the former met the French in force near Nottingham, and came back much faster than they went. And the latter stumbled on Gilbert of Ghent, riding out of Lincoln to Folkingham, and had to flee into the fens, and came back much slower than they went.

At last news came. For into Bourne stalked Walfrie the Heron, with axe, and bow, and leaping-pole on shoulder; and an evil tale he brought.

The Danes had been beaten utterly at Norwich. The Frenchmen had fought like lions. They had killed many Danes in the assault on the castle. They had sallied out on them as they recoiled; and driven them into the river, drowning many more. The Danes had gone down the Yare again, and out to sea northward, no man knew whither. He, the Heron, prowling about the fenlands of Norfolk, to pick off straggling Frenchmen and look out for the Danes, had heard all the news from the landsfolk. He had watched the Danish fleet along the shore as far as Blakeney. But when they came to the isle, they stood out to sea, right north-west. He, the Heron, believed that they were gone for Humber Mouth.

After a while, he had heard how Hereward was come again, and had sent round the war-arrow; and it seemed to him that a landless man could be in no better company,

wherefore he had taken boat, and come across the deep fen. And there he was, if they had need of him.

‘Need of you?’ said Hereward, who had heard of the deed at Wrokesham Bridge. ‘Need of a hundred like you. But this is bitter news.’

And he went in to ask counsel of Torfrida, ready to weep with rage. He had disappointed—deceived his men. He had drawn them into a snare. He had promised that the Danes should come. How should he look them in the face?

‘Look them in the face?’ Do that at once: now: without losing a moment. Call them together and tell them all. If their hearts are staunch, you may do great things without the traitor earl. If their hearts fail them, you would have done nothing with them worthy of yourself, had you had Norway as well as Denmark at your back. At least, be true with them, as your only chance of keeping them true to you.’

‘Wise, wise wife,’ said Hereward, and went out and called his band together, and told them every word, and all that had passed since he left Calais Straits.

‘And now I have deceived you, and entrapped you, and I have no right to be your captain more. He that will depart in peace, let him depart, before the Frenchmen close in on us on every side and swallow us up at one mouthful.’

Not a man answered.

‘I say it again: He that will depart, let him depart.’

They stood thoughtful.

Winter spoke at last.

‘If all go, there are two men here who stay, and fight by Hereward’s side as long as there is a Frenchman left on English soil, for they have sworn an oath to heaven and to St. Peter, and that oath will they keep. What say you, Gwenoch, knighted with us at Peterborough?’

Gwenoch stepped to Hereward’s side.

‘None shall go!’ shouted a dozen voices. ‘With Hereward we will live and die. Let him lead us to

Lincoln, to Nottingham—where he will We can save, England for ourselves without the help of Danes’

*Hannibal.* A celebrated general of Carthage, a city of North Africa, and the deadly foe of the Romans. Died 182 B.C.

*Cæsar.* The most famous of the Romans, and the founder of the Roman Empire. Murdered 44 B.C.

*Fredric.* A king of Prussia, who raised his country from an insignificant state to a powerful kingdom. Died 1786.

*Commissariats.* Arrangements for supplying food to an army.

*Piecemeal.* Little by little.

*Mercenary.* One who works for hire.

*Ermine Street.* One of the old Roman roads, running through the fenland from London to Lincoln.

*Staunch.* Brave and true.

## CHAPTER XXXVI

### HOW HEReward FOUND A WISER MAN IN ENGLAND THAN HIMSELF

[The Danes, sailing along the coast, landed at last at the mouth of the Humber; and then advancing inland, besieged and took York, which was defended by a garrison of Normans. York was set on fire, and utterly destroyed]

THERE have been certain men so great, that he who describes them in words must be a very great man himself, or incur the accusation of presumption. And such a great man was William of Normandy—one of those unfathomable master-personages, who must not be rashly dragged on any stage.

But one may fancy, for once in a way, what William’s thoughts were, when they brought him the evil news of York. For we know what his acts were; and he acted up to his thoughts.

Hunting he was, they say, in the Forest of Dean, when first he heard that all England, north of the Watling Street, had broken loose, and that he was king of only half the isle.

Did he—as when, hunting in the Forest of Bowen, he got the news of Harold's coronation—play with his bow, stringing and unstringing it nervously, till he had made up his mighty mind? Then did he go home to his lodge, and there spread on the rough oak board a parchment map of England, which no child would deign to learn from now, but was then good enough to guide armies to victory, because the eyes of a great general looked upon it?

As he pored over the map, by the light of a bog-deal torch or rush candle, what would he see upon it?

Three separate blazes of insurrection, from north-west to east, along the Watling Street.

At Chester, Edric, 'the wild Thane,' who, according to Domesday-book, had lost vast lands in Shropshire; Harold's widow; and all the Welsh. Edwin, the young earl, Hereward's nephew—he must be with them, too, if he were a man.

Eastward, round Stafford, and the centre of Mercia, another blaze of furious English valour. Morcar, Edwin's brother, must be there, as their earl, if he too was a man.

Then in the fens and Kesteven. What meant this news, that Hereward of St. Omer was come again, and an army with him? That he was levying war on all Frenchmen, in the name of Sweyn, King of Denmark and of England? He is an outlaw, a desperado, a boastful swash-buckler, thought William, it may be, to himself. He found out, in after years, that he had mistaken his man.

And last, and worst of all, hung on the eastern coast the mighty fleet of Sweyn, who claimed England as his of right. The foe whom he had most feared ever since he set foot on English soil, a collision with whom had been inevitable all along, was come at last: but where would he strike his blow?

William knew, doubt it not, that the Danes had been defeated at Norwich: he knew, doubt it not, for his spies told him everything, that they had purposed entering the Wash. To prevent a junction between them and Hereward

was impossible. He must prevent a junction between them and Edwin and Morcar.

He determined, it seems—for he did it—to cut the English line in two, and marched upon Stafford as its centre.

But all records of these campaigns are fragmentary, confused, contradictory. The Normans fought, and had no time to write history. The English, beaten and crushed, died and left no sign.

So all we know is, that William fell upon Morcar's men at Stafford, and smote them with a great destruction, rolling the fugitives west and east, toward Edwin, perhaps, at Chester, certainly toward Hereward in the fens.

At Stafford met him the fugitives from York, with the dreadful news that the Danes had besieged the city, and that York was lost.

William burst into fiendish fury. He accused the wretched men of treason. He cut off their hands, thrust out their eyes; threw them into prison, and stormed on northward.

He lay at Pontefract for three weeks. The bridges over the Aire were broken down. But at last he crossed and marched on York.

No man opposed him. The Danes were gone down to the Humber.

Then William had his revenge. he destroyed, in the language of Scripture, 'the life of the land.' Far and wide the farms were burnt over their owners' heads, the growing crops upon the ground; the horses were houghed, the cattle driven off; while of human death and misery there was no end. Yorkshire and much of the neighbouring countries lay waste for the next nine years. It did not recover itself fully till several generations after.

The Danes had boasted that they would keep their Yule at York. William kept his Yule there instead. He sent to Winchester for the regalia of the Confessor; and in the midst of the blackened ruins, while the English for miles around wandered starving in the snows, feeding on

carrion, on rats and mice, and at last upon each other's corpses, he sat in his royal robes, and gave away the lands of Edwin and Morcar to his liegemen. And thus, like the Romans, from whom he derived both his strategy and his civilisation, he 'made a solitude, and called it peace.'

Then William turned south-west. Edwin, wild Edric, the dispossessed thane of Shropshire, and the wilder Welshmen, were still harrying and slaying. They had just attacked Shrewsbury. William would come upon them by a way they thought not of.

So over the backbone of England, by way probably of Halifax or Huddersfield; through pathless moors and bogs, down towards the plains of Lancashire and Cheshire, he pushed over and on. His soldiers from the plains of sunny France could not face the cold, the rain, the morasses, the hideous gorges, the valiant peasants—still the finest and shrewdest race of men in all England—who set upon them in wooded glens, or rolled stones on them from the limestone crags. They prayed to be dismissed, to go home.

'Cowards might go back,' said William, 'he should go on.' If he could not ride, he would walk. Whoever lagged, he would be foremost. And cheered by his example, the army at last debouched upon the Cheshire flats

Then he fell upon Edwin, as he had fallen upon Morcar. He drove the wild Welsh through the pass of Mold, and up into their native hills. He laid all waste with fire and sword for many a mile, as Domesday-book testifies to this day. He strengthened the walls of Chester; trampled out the last embers of rebellion; and went down south to Salisbury, King of England once again.

*Watling Street.* One of the old Roman roads. It ran from Dover to

Chester, passing through London.

*Rouen.* The capital city of Normandy.

*Bogdeal.* Fossil wood found in a bog or morass.

*Desperado.* A ruffian, or reckless scoundrel.

*Swash-buckler.* A boaster or swaggerer.

*Hough.* To cut the muscle in the lower part of the thigh.  
*Rogien.* The crown and royal jewels.  
*Laggel.* Lingered, hung back  
*Debouchd.* Marched out.

## CHAPTER XXXVII

### HOW HEREWARD BURNED THE GOLDEN BOROUGH

IN the course of that winter died good Abbot Brand; and a week after came news that Thorold of Malmesbury was coming to take the abbey of Peterborough, and had got as far as Stamford, with a right royal train.

Then Hereward sent Abbot Thorold word that if he or his Frenchmen put foot into Peterborough, he Hereward would burn it over their heads. And that if he rode a mile beyond Stamford town, he should walk into it bare-foot in his shirt.

Whereon Thorold abode at Stamford, and kept up his spirits by singing the song of Roland, which some say he himself composed.

A week after that, and the Danes were come; but plunder they must have

‘And plunder you shall have!’ said Hereward, as a sudden thought struck him. ‘I will show you the way to the Golden Borough—the richest minster in England; and all the treasures of the Golden Borough shall be yours, if you will treat Englishmen as friends, and spare the people of the fens’

It was a great crime in the eyes of men of that time. A great crime, taken simply, in Hereward’s own eyes. But necessity has no law. Something the Danes must have, and ought to have; and St. Peter’s gold was better in their purses, than in that of Thorold and his French monks.

That night the monks of Peterborough prayed in the minster till the long hours passed into the short. The

servants of the monastery fled from the town outside into the Milton woods. The monks prayed on inside till an hour after matins. When the first flush of the summer's dawn began to show in the north-eastern sky, they heard, mingling with their own chant, another chant, which Peterborough had not heard since it was Medehamstead, three hundred years ago;—the terrible Yuch-hey-saa-saa—the war-song of the Vikings of the north.

Their chant stopped of itself. With blanched faces and trembling knees, they fled, regardless of all discipline, up into the minster tower; and from the leads looked out north-eastward on the fen.

The first rays of the summer sun were just streaming over the vast sheet of emerald, and glittering upon the winding river; and on a winding line, too, seemingly endless, of scarlet coats and shields, black hulls, gilded poops and vanes and beak-heads, and the flash and foam of innumerable oars.

And nearer and louder came the oar-roll, like thunder working up from the east; and mingled with it, that grim yet laughing Heysaa, which bespoke in its very note the revelry of slaughter.

The ships had all their sails on deck. But as they came nearer, the monks could see the banners of the two foremost vessels.

The one was the red and white of the terrible Dannebrog. The other, the scarcely less terrible Wake-knot of Hereward.

‘He will burn the minster! He has vowed to do it. As a child he vowed, and he must do it. In this very minster the fiend entered into him and possessed him, and to this minster has the fiend brought him back to do his will. Bring forth the relics, my brethren. Bring forth, above all things, those flings of St. Peter’s own chains, the special glory of our monastery—and perhaps its safeguard this day.’

They brought out all the relics. They brought out the flings themselves, in a box of gold. They held them



out over the walls at the ships, and called on all the saints to whom they belonged. But the Heysaa rose louder and nearer. The Danes were coming. And they came.

And all the while a thousand skylarks rose from off the fen, and chanted their own chant aloft, as if appealing to heaven against that which man's greed, and man's rage, and man's superstition, had made of this fair earth of God.

The relics had been brought out: but, as they would not work, the only thing to be done was to put them back again and hide them safe, lest they should be carried into captivity themselves, being worth a very large sum of money in the eyes of the more Christian part of the Danish host.

Then to hide the treasures as well as they could; which they hid somewhere in the steeple.

The Danes were landing now. The shout which they gave as they leaped on shore made the hearts of the poor monks sink low. Would they be murdered, as well as robbed? Perhaps not—probably not. Hereward would see to that. And some wanted to capitulate.

Herluin would not hear of it. They were safe enough. St. Peter's relics might not have worked a miracle on the spot: but they must have done something. St. Peter had been appealed to on his honour, and on his honour he must surely take the matter up. At all events, the walls and gates were strong, and the Danes had no artillery. Let them howl and rage round the holy place, till Abbot Thorold and the Frenchmen of the country rose and drove them to their ships.

In that last thought the cunning Frenchman was not so far wrong. The Danes pushed up through the little town, and to the minster gates; but entrance was impossible; and they prowled round and round like raging wolves about a winter steading: but found no crack of entry.

Prior Herluin grew bold; and coming to the leads of

the gateway tower, looked over cautiously, and holding up a certain most sacred emblem cursed them in the name of all his saints.

'Aha, Herluin? Are you there?' asked a short square man in gay armour.

'Thou art Winter?' and the prior uttered what would be considered from any but a churchman's lips a blasphemous and bloodthirsty curse.

With his sharp swift French priest's tongue he sneered, he jeered, he scolded, he argued; and then threatened. Suddenly changing his tone, in words of real eloquence he appealed to the superstitions of his hearers. He threatened them with supernatural vengeance. He set before them all the terrors of the unseen world.

Some of them began to slink away frightened. St. Peter was an ill man to have a blood feud with.

Winter stood, laughing and jeering in return, for full ten minutes. At last—'I asked, and you have not answered: have you forgotten the old peatstack outside Bolldyke Gate? For if you have, The Wake has not. He has piled it against the gate, and it should be burnt through by this time. Go and see.'

Herluin disappeared with a curse.

'Now, you sea-cocks,' said Winter, springing up. 'We'll to the Bolldyke Gate, and all start fair.'

*Song of Roland.* A song relating the achievements of Roland, nephew of Charlemagne. William the Conqueror caused it to be sung at the head of his troops when he was invading England.

*Matins.* The morning service.

*Blanched.* Pale with fear.

*Dannebrog.* The red cross of Denmark. The legend is that a king of Denmark saw in the heavens a fiery cross, which betokened a coming victory in war.

*As a child he vowed.* It was related of Hereward that when only seven years old, he had vowed that he would burn Peterborough some day, to avenge a grudge he had against Herluin the Prior.

*Capitulate* To surrender upon agreed terms.

*Bolldyke gate.* Bull ditch gate. The southern gate of the monastery.

## CHAPTER XXXVIII

## HOW HERWARD MET ALFTRUDA AGAIN

THE Bolldyke Gate was on fire; and more, so were the suburbs. There was no time to save them, as Hereward would gladly have done, for the sake of the inhabitants. They must go:—on to the Bolldyke Gate. Who cared to put out flames behind him, with all the treasures of Golden Borough before him? In a few minutes all the town was alight. In a few minutes more, the monastery likewise.

Then the men rushed into the Bolldyke Gate, while Hereward and Winter stood and looked with their men, whom they kept close together, waiting their commands. The Danes and their allies cared not for the great glowing heap of peat. They cared not for each other, hardly for themselves. They rushed into the gap; they thrust the glowing heap inward through the gateway with their lances; they thrust each other down into it, and trampled over them to fall themselves, rising scorched and withered, and yet struggling on toward the gold of the Golden Borough. One savage Lett caught another round the waist, and hurled him bodily into the fire, crying in his wild tongue—

‘You will make a good stepping-stone for me.’

‘That is not fair,’ quoth Hereward, and clove him to the chine.

It was wild work. But the Golden Borough was won.

‘We must in now and save the monks,’ said Hereward, and dashed over the embers.

He was only just in time. In the midst of the great court were all the monks, huddled together like a flock of sheep, some kneeling, most weeping bitterly, after the fashion of monks.

Only Herluin stood in front of them, at bay, a lofty crucifix in his hand. He had no mind to weep. But with a face of calm and bitter wrath, he preferred words

of peace and entreaty. They were what the time needed. Therefore they should be given To-morrow he would write to the Bishop, to excommunicate with bell, book, and candle, to the lowest pit of Tartarus, all who had done the deed.

But to-day he spoke them fair. However, his fair speeches profited little, not being understood by a horde of Letts and Finns, who howled and bayed at him, and tried to tear the crucifix from his hand : but feared 'The white Christ.'

They were already gaining courage from their own yells ; in a moment more blood would have been shed, and then a general massacre must have ensued.

Hereward saw it, and shouting 'After me, Hereward's men ! A Wake ! A Wake !' swung Letts and Finns right and left like cornsheaves, and stood face to face with Herluin.

An angry savage smote him on the hind head full with a stone axe. He staggered, and then looked round and laughed.

'Fool ! hast thou not heard that Hereward's armour was forged by dwarfs in the mountain-bowels ? Off, and hunt for gold, or it will be all gone.'

The Finn, who was astonished at getting no more from his blow than a few sparks, and expected instant death in return, took the hint and vanished jabbering, as did his fellows.

'Now, Herluin the Frenchman !' said Hereward.

'Now, Hereward the robber of saints !' said Herluin.

It was a fine sight. The soldier and the churchman, the Englishman and the Frenchman, the man of the then world, and the man of the then Church, pitted fairly, face to face

Hereward tried for one moment to stare down Herluin. But those terrible eye-glances, before which Vikings had quailed, turned off harmless from the more terrible glance of the man who believed himself backed by the Maker of the universe, and all the hierarchy of heaven.

A sharp, unlovely face it was; though, like many a great churchman's face of those days, it was neither thin nor haggard: but rather round, sleek, of a puffy and unwholesome paleness. But there was a thin lip above a broad square jaw, which showed that Herluin was neither fool nor coward.

'A robber and a child of Belial thou hast been from thy cradle; and a robber and a child of Belial thou art now. Dare thy last iniquity. Slay the servants of St. Peter on St. Peter's altar, with thy worthy comrades, the heathen Saracens, and set up Mahound with them in the holy place.'

Hereward laughed so jolly a laugh, that the prior was taken aback.

'Slay St. Peter's monks? Not even his rats! I am a monk's knight, as my knot testifies. There shall not a hair of your head be touched. Only, I must clear out all Frenchmen hence; and all Englishmen likewise, as storks have chosen to pack with the cranes. Here, Hereward's men! march these traitors and their French prior safe out of the walls, and into Milton woods, to look after their poor people'

'Out of this place I stir not. Here I am, and here I will live or die, as St. Peter shall send aid.'

But as he spoke he was precipitated rudely forward, and hurried almost into Hereward's arms. The whole body of monks, when they heard Hereward's words, cared to hear no more: but, desperate between fear and joy, rushed forward, bearing away their prior in the midst.

'So go the rats out of Peterborough, and so is my dream fulfilled. Now for the treasure, and then to Ely.'

But Herluin burst himself clear of the frantic mob of monks, and turned back on Hereward.

'Thou wast dubbed knight in that church!'

'I know it, man, and that church and the relics of the saints in it are safe therefore Hereward gives his word.'

'That—but not that only, if thou art a true knight, as thou holdest, Englishman.'

Hereward growled savagely, and made an ugly step

toward Herluin. That was a point which he would not have questioned.

‘Then behave as a knight, and save, save’—as the monks dragged him away—‘save the hospice! There are women—ladies there!’ shouted he, as he was borne off.

They never met again on earth · but both comforted themselves in after years, that two old enemies’ last deed in common had been one of mercy.

Hereward uttered a cry of horror. He rushed to the door. It was not yet burst: but a bench, swung by strong arms, was battering it in fast.

‘To me, Hereward’s men! Stand back, fellows. Here are friends here inside. If you do not, I’ll cut you down’

But in vain. The door was burst, and in poured the savage mob. Hereward, unable to stop them, headed them, or pretended to do so, with five or six of his own men round him, and went into the hall.

On the rushes lay some half-dozen grooms. They were butchered instantly, simply because they were there. Hereward saw: but could not prevent. He ran as hard as he could to the foot of the wooden stair which led to the upper floor.

‘Guard the stair-foot, Winter!’ and he ran up.

Two women cowered upon the floor, shrieking and praying with hands clasped over their heads. He saw that the arms of one of them were of the most delicate whiteness, and judging her to be the lady, bent over her. ‘Lady! you are safe. I will protect you. I am Hereward.’

She sprang up, and threw herself with a scream into his arms.

‘Hereward! Hereward! Save me. I am——’

‘Alftruda!’ said Hereward.

It was Alftruda; if possible more beautiful than ever.

‘I have got you!’ she cried. ‘I am safe now. Take me away—Out of this horrible place—Take me into the woods—Anywhere—Only do not let me be burnt here—stifled like a rat. Give me air! Give me water!’ and she clung to him so madly that Hereward, as he held her

in his arms, and gazed on her extraordinary beauty, forgot Torfrida for a second of time.

But there was no time to indulge in evil thoughts, even had any crossed his mind. He caught her in his arms, and commanding the maid to follow, hurried down the stair.

*Tarturean*. Resembling Tartarus, or the infernal regions.

*Lotts*. A tribe dwelling upon the eastern shores of the Baltic Sea.

*Chine*. The back-bone

*Bell, book, and candle*. To pronounce a curse with bell, book, and candle was to read the anathema, or condemnation of the person, in church, and at the close to cast the Bible on the ground, to toll the bell, and to extinguish all the candles.

*Fiens*. Inhabitants of Finland.

*The white Christ*. The name applied by the savage tribes of the north to the image on a crucifix.

*Hierarchy*. The heavenly host

*Child of Belial*. Child of the devil; a lawless, worthless person

*Saracens*. The Danes were often mistaken by mediæval churchmen for Saracens

*Mahound*. Another name for Mahomet.

## CHAPTER XXXIX

### HOW HEREWARD WENT TO ELY

WINTER and the Siwards were defending the foot with swinging blades. The savages were howling round like curs about a bull; and when Hereward appeared above with the women, there was a loud yell of rage and envy.

He should not have the women to himself—They would share the plunder equally—was shouted in half a dozen barbarous dialects.

‘Have you left any valuables in the chamber?’ whispered he to Alfruda.

‘Yes, jewels—robes—Let them have all, only save me!’

‘Let me pass!’ roared Hereward. ‘There is rich boot



Winter and the Swards were defending the foot with swinging blades —Page 164



in the room above, and you may have it as these ladies' ransom. Them you do not touch. Back, I say, let me pass !'

And he rushed forward. Winter and the housecarles formed round him and the women, and hurried down the hall ; while the savages hurried up the ladder, to quarrel over their spoil.

They were out in the courtyard, and safe for the moment. But whither should he take her ?

'To Earl Asbiorn,' said one of the Siwards. But how to find him ?

'There is Bishop Christiern !' And the bishop was caught and stopped.

'This is an evil day's work, Sir Hereward.'

'Then help to mend it by taking care of these ladies, like a man of God.' And he explained the case.

'You may come safely with me, my poor lambs,' said the bishop. 'I am glad to find something to do fit for a churchman. To me, my housecarles'

But they were all off plundering.

'We will stand by you and the ladies, and see you safe down to the ships,' said Winter, and so they went off.

Hereward would gladly have gone with them, as Alfruda piteously entreated him. But he heard his name called on every side in angry tones.

'Who wants Hereward ?'

'Earl Asbiorn—Here he is.'

'Those scoundrel monks have hidden all the altar furniture. If you wish to save them from being tortured to death, you had best find it.'

Hereward ran with him into the cathedral. It was a hideous sight ; torn books and vestments, broken tabernacle-work ; foul savages swarming in and out of every dark aisle and cloister, like wolves in search of prey ; five or six ruffians aloft upon the rood-screen ; one tearing the golden crown from the head of the crucifix, another the golden footstool from its feet

As Hereward came up, crucifix and man fell together,

crashing upon the pavement, amid shouts of brutal laughter.

He hurried past them, shuddering, into the choir. The altar was bare; the golden cloth which covered it, gone.

'It may be in the crypt below. I suppose the monks keep their relics there,' said Asbiorn.

'No! Not there. Do not touch the relics! Would you have the curse of all the saints? Stay! I know an old hiding-place. It may be there. Up into the steeple with me.'

And in the chamber in the steeple they found the golden pall, and treasures countless and wonderful.

'We had better keep the knowledge of this to ourselves awhile,' said Earl Asbiorn, looking with greedy eyes on a heap of wealth such as he had never beheld before.

'Not we! Hereward is a man of his word, and we will share and share alike.'

'What will you?' And Asbiorn caught him by the arm. 'This treasure belongs of right to Sweyn the king.'

'It belongs to St. Peter, who must lend it to-day to save the poor fen-men from robbers and ravishers; and not to any king on earth. Take off thine hand, jarl, if thou wouldst keep it safe on thy body.'

Asbiorn drew back, gnashing his teeth with rage. To strike Hereward was more than he, or any Berserker in his host, dared to do: and besides, he felt that Hereward's words were just.

'Hither!' shouted Hereward down the stair. 'Up hither, Vikings, Berserkers, and sea-cocks all! Here is gold, here is the dwarf's work, here is the dragon's hoard! Here, wolves and ravens, eat gold, drink gold, roll in gold, and know that Hereward is a man of his word, and pays his soldiers' wages royally.'

They rushed up the narrow stair, trampling each other to death, and thrust Hereward and the earl, choking, into a corner. The room was so full for a few moments that some died in it. Hereward and Asbiorn, protected by

their strong armour, forced their way to the narrow window, and breathed through it, looking out upon the sea of flame below.

‘I am sorry for you, jarl,’ said Hereward. ‘But for the poor Englishmen’s sake, so it must be.’

‘King Sweyn shall judge of that. Why dost hold my wrist, man?’

‘Daggers are apt to get loose in such a press as this.’

‘Always The Wake,’ said Asbiorn, with a forced laugh

‘Always The Wake. And as thou saidst, King Sweyn the just shall judge between us.’

Jarl Asbiorn swung from him, and into the now thinning press. Soon only a few remained, to search, by the glare of the flames, for what their fellows might have overlooked.

‘Now the play is played out,’ said Hereward, ‘we may as well go down and to our ships.’

Some drunken ruffians would have burnt the church for mere mischief. But Asbiorn, as well as Hereward, stopped that. And gradually they got the men down to the ships; some drunk, some struggling under plunder; some cursing and quarrelling because nothing had fallen to their lot. It was a hideous scene: but one to which Hereward, as well as Asbiorn, was too well accustomed to see aught in it save an hour’s inevitable trouble in getting the men on board.

The monks had all fled. And so was the Golden Borough sacked and burnt.

After which Hereward took Torfrida, and his child, and all he had, and took ship at Bardeney, and went for Ely. Which when Earl Warrenne heard, he laid wait for him, seemingly near Littleport: but got nothing thereby but the pleasure of giving and taking a great deal of bad language; and (after his men had refused, reasonably enough, to swim the Ouse and attack Hereward) an arrow, which Hereward, stooping forward, shot at him across the Ouse, as the earl stood cursing on the top of the dyke. Which arrow flew so stout and strong, that though it

sprang back from Earl Warrenne's hauberk, it knocked him almost senseless off his horse, and forced him to defer his purpose of avenging Sir Frederic his brother.

After which Hereward threw himself into Ely, and assumed, by consent of all, the command of the English who were therein.

*Rood screen* A screen placed across a church, upon which a crucifix is erected.

*Crypt* A great cell or vault under a church.

*Earl Warrenne* A Norman noble, distantly related to the Conqueror. He had been one of the commanders at Hastings.

*Hauberk.* A coat of mail without sleeves.

## CHAPTER XL

### HOW THEY HELD A GREAT MEETING IN THE HALL OF ELY

[After some time, Sweyn himself came over from Denmark, and council was held as to whether the Danes should continue fighting on behalf of the English.]

THERE sat round the hall of Ely all the magnates of the east land and east sea. The abbot was on his high seat; and on a seat higher than his, prepared specially, Sweyn Ulfsson, King of Denmark and England. By them sat the bishops; Asbiorn; the young Earls Edwin and Morcar, and Sweyn's two sons; and Hereward himself. Below them were knights, Vikings, captains, great holders from Denmark, and the prior and inferior officers of Ely minster. And at the bottom of the misty hall, on the other side of the column of blue vapour which went trembling up from the great heap of burning turf amidst, were housecarles, monks, wild men from the Baltic shores, crowded together to hear what was done in that parliament of their betters

They spoke like free Danes; the betters from the upper

end of the hall, but every man as he chose. They were in full Thing; in parliament, as their forefathers had been wont to be for countless ages. Their House of Lords and their House of Commons were not yet defined from each other: but they knew the rules of the house, the courtesies of debate; and, by practice of free speech, had educated themselves to bear and forbear, like gentlemen.

But the speaking was loud and earnest, often angry that day. 'What was to be done?' was the question before the house.

'That depended,' said Sweyn, the wise and prudent king, 'on what could be done by the English to co-operate with them.' And what that was has been already told.

'When Tosti Godwinsson, ye bishops, jarls, knights, and holders, came to me five years ago, and bade me take my rights in this land of England, I answered him that I had not wit enough to do the deeds which Canute my uncle did, and so sat still in peace. I little thought that I should have lost in five years so much of those small wits to which I confessed, that I should come after all to take my rightful kingdom of England, and find two kings in it already, both more to the English mind than I am. While Willam the Frenchman is king by the sword, and Edgar the Englishman king by proclamation of earls and thanes, there seems no room here for Sweyn, nephew of Canute, king of kings.'

'We will make room for you! We will make a road from here to Winchester!' shouted the meeting, with one voice.

'It is too late. What say you, Hereward Leofricsson, who go for a wise man among men?'

Hereward rose, and spoke gracefully, earnestly, eloquently but he could not deny Sweyn's plain words.

'The Wake beats about the bush,' said Jarl Asbiorn, rising when Hereward sat down. 'None knows better than he that all is over. Earl Edwin and Earl Morcar, who should have helped us along Watling Street, are here

fugitives. We had better go home before we have eaten up the monks of Ely.'

Then Hereward rose again, and without an openly insulting word poured forth his scorn and rage upon Asbiorn. Why had he not kept to the agreement which he and Countess Gyda had made with him through Tosti's sons? Why had he wasted time and men from Dover to Norwich, instead of coming straight into the fens, and marching inland to succour Morcar and Edwin? Asbiorn had ruined the plan, and he only, if it was ruined.

'And who was I, to obey The Wake?' asked Asbiorn fiercely.

'And who wert thou, to disobey me?' asked Sweyn in a terrible voice. 'Hereward is right. We shall see what thou sayest to all this, in full Thing at home in Denmark.'

Then Edwin rose, entreating peace. 'They were beaten. The hand of God was against them. Why should they struggle any more? Or, if they struggled on, why should they involve the Danes in their own ruin?'

Then man after man rose, and spoke rough Danish common sense. They had come hither to win England. They had found it won already. Let them take what they had got from Peterborough, and go

'That is right!' cried Hereward. 'Let them take the plunder of Peterborough as pay for what they have done, and what besides they would have done if Asbiorn the jarl—nay, men of England, let us be just!—what Asbiorn himself would have done if there had been heart and wit, one mind and one purpose, in England. The Danes have done their best. They have shown themselves what they are, our blood and kin. I know that some talk of treason, of bribes. Let us have no more such vain and foul suspicions. They came as our friends; and as our friends let them go, and leave us to fight out our own quarrel to the last drop of blood.'

'Would God!' said Sweyn, 'thou wouldest go too, thou good knight. Here, earls and gentlemen of England! Sweyn Ulfsson offers to every one of you, who will come

to Denmark with him, shelter and hospitality till better times shall come.'

Then arose a mixed cry. Some would go, some would not. Some of the Danes took the proposal cordially; some feared bringing among themselves men who would needs want land, of which there was none to give. If the English came, they must go up the Baltic, and conquer fresh lands for themselves from heathen Letts and Finns.

Then Hereward rose again, and spoke so nobly and so well that all ears were charmed.

They were Englishmen; and they would rather die in their own merry England than win new kingdoms in the cold north-east. They were sworn, the leaders of them, to die or conquer, fighting the accursed Frenchman.

And every Englishman shouted, 'Hereward is right! We will live and die fighting the French.'

And Sweyn Ulfsson rose again, and said with a great oath, 'That if there had been three such men as Hereward in England, all would have gone well.'

Hereward laughed. 'Thou art wrong for once, wise king. We have failed, just because there were a dozen men in England as good as I, every man wanting his own way; and too many cooks have spoiled the broth. What we wanted is not a dozen men like me, but one like thee, to take us all by the back of the neck and shake us soundly, and say, "Do that, or die!"'

And so, after much talk, the meeting broke up. And when it broke up, there came to Hereward in the hall a noble-looking man of his own age, and put his hand within his, and said—

'Do you not know me, Hereward Leofricsson?'

'I know thee not, good knight, more pity; but by thy dress and carriage, thou shouldest be a true Vikingsson.'

'I am Sigtryg Ranaldsson, now King of Waterford. And my wife said to me, "If there be treachery or faint-heartedness, remember this—that Hereward Leofricsson slew the ogre, and Hannibal of Marazion likewise, and brought me safe to thee. And, therefore, if thou provest

fugitives. We had better go home before we have eaten up the monks of Ely.'

Then Hereward rose again, and without an openly insulting word poured forth his scorn and rage upon Asbiorn. Why had he not kept to the agreement which he and Countess Gyda had made with him through Tosti's sons? Why had he wasted time and men from Dover to Norwich, instead of coming straight into the fens, and marching inland to succour Morcar and Edwin? Asbiorn had ruined the plan, and he only, if it was ruined.

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'Would God!' said Sweyn, 'thou wouldest go too, thou good knight. Here, earls and gentlemen of England! Sweyn Ulfsson offers to every one of you, who will come



## CHAPTER XLI

## HOW THEY FOUGHT AT ALDRETH (1)

WHEN William heard that the Danes were gone, he marched on Ely, as on an easy prey

Ivo Taillebois came with him, hungry after those Spalding lands, the rents whereof Hereward had been taking for his men for now twelve months. William de Warrenne was there, vowed to revenge the death of Sir Frederic, his brother. And with them were all the Frenchmen of the east, who had been either expelled from their lands, or were in fear of expulsion.

With them, too, was a great army of mercenaries, ruffians from all France and Flanders, hired to fight for a certain term, on the chance of plunder, or of fiefs in land. Their brains were all aflame with the tales of inestimable riches hidden in Ely. There were there the jewels of all the monasteries round; there were the treasures of all the fugitive English nobles; there were there—what was there not? And they grumbled when William halted them and hutted them at Cambridge, and began to feel cautiously the strength of the place—which must be strong, or Hereward and the English would not have made it their camp of refuge.

Perhaps he rode up to Madingley windmill; and saw fifteen miles away, clear against the sky, the long line of what seemed nought but a low upland park, with the minster tower among the trees; and between him and them, a rich champaign of grass, over which it was easy enough to march all the armies of Europe; and thought Ely an easy place to take. But men told him that between him and those trees lay a black abyss of mud and peat and reeds, Haddenham fen and Smithy fen, with the deep sullen West water of the Ouse winding through them. The old Roman road to Stretham was sunk and gone long since under the bog, whether by English neglect,

or whether (as some think) by actual and bodily sinking of the whole land. The narrowest space between dry land and dry land was a full half-mile; and how to cross that half-mile, no man knew.

What were the approaches on the west? There were none. Beyond Earith, where now run the great washes of the Bedford Level, was a howling wilderness of meres, eas, reeds, and floating alder-beds, through which only the fen-men wandered, with leaping-pole and log-canoe.

What in the east? The dry land neared the island on that side. And it may be that William rowed round by Burwell to Fordham and Soham, and thought of attempting the island by way of Barraway; and saw beneath him a labyrinth of islands, meres, fens, with the Cam, increased by the volume of the Ouse, spreading far deeper and broader than now; and saw, too, that a disaster in that labyrinth might be a destruction.

So he determined on the near and straight path, through Long Stanton and Willingham, down the old bridle-way from Willingham ploughed field;—every village there, and in the isle likewise, had and has still its ‘field,’ or ancient clearing of ploughed land—and then to try that terrible half-mile, with the courage and wit of a general to whom human lives were as those of the gnats under the hedge.

So all his host camped themselves in Willingham field, by the old earthwork which men now call Belsar’s Hills and down the bridle-way poured countless men, bearing timber and faggots, cut from all the hills, that they might bridge the black half-mile.

They made a narrow firm path through the reeds, and down to the brink of the Ouse, if brink it could be called, where the water, rising and falling a foot or two each tide, covered the floating peat for many yards, before it sunk into a brown depth of bottomless slime. They would make a bottom for themselves by driving piles.

The piles would not hold; and they began to make a floating bridge with long beams and blown-up cattle-hides to float them.

Soon they made a floating-sow, and thrust it on before them as they worked across the stream, for they were getting under shot from the island.

Meanwhile the besieged had not been idle. They had thrown up a turf rampart on the island shore, and overhanging 'hoardings,' or scaffolds, through the floor of which they could shower down missiles. And so they awaited the attack, contenting themselves with gliding in and out of the reeds in their canoes, and annoying the builders with arrows and cross-bow bolts.

At last the bridge was finished, and the sow safe across the Westwater; and thrust in, as far as it would float, among the reeds on the high tide. They in the fort could touch it with a pole.

The English would have destroyed it if they could. But The Wake bade them leave it alone. He had watched all their work, and made up his mind to the event.

'The rats have set a trap for themselves,' he said to his men, 'and we shall be fools to break it up till the rats are safe inside.'

So there the huge sow lay, black and silent, showing nothing to the enemy but a side of strong plank, covered with hide to prevent its being burned. It lay there for three hours, and The Wake let it lie.

He had never been so cheerful, so confident. 'Play the man this day, every one of you, and ere nightfall you will have taught the Frenchman once more the lesson of York. He seems to have forgotten that. It is time to remind him of it.'

And he looked to his bow and to his arrows, and prepared to play the man himself; as was the fashion in those old days, when a general proved his worth by hitting harder and more surely than any of his men.

*Fiefs.* Estates held of a feudal lord

*Madingley windmill.* A windmill on high ground just outside Cambridge.

*Floating-sow.* A shelter made of beams and planks covered with hide.

## CHAPTER XLII

## HOW THEY FOUGHT AT ALDRETH (2)

At last the army was in motion, and Willingham field opposite was like a crawling ants' nest. Brigade after brigade moved down to the reed beds, and the assault began.

And now advanced along the causeway, and along the bridge, a dark column of men, surmounted by glittering steel; knights in complete mail, footmen in leather coats and jerkins; at first orderly enough, each under the banner of his lord: but more and more mingled and crowded, as each hurried forward, eager for his selfish share of the inestimable treasures of Ely. They pushed along the bridge. The mass became more and more crowded; men stumbled over each other, and fell off into the mire and water, calling vainly for help: but their comrades hurried on unheeding, in the mad thirst for spoil.

On they came in thousands; and fresh thousands streamed out of the fields, as if the whole army intended to pour itself into the isle at once.

'They are numberless,' said Torfrida, in a serious and astonished voice, as she stood by Hereward's side.

'Would they were!' said Hereward. 'Let them come on, thick and threefold. The more their numbers, the fatter will the fish below be, before to-morrow morning. Look there, already!'

And already the bridge was swaying, and sinking beneath their weight. The men, in places, were ankle deep in water. They rushed on all the more eagerly; filled the sow, and swarmed up to its roof.

Then, what with its own weight, what with the weight of the laden bridge which dragged upon it from behind, the huge sow began to tilt backwards, and slide down the slimy bank.

The men on the top tried vainly to keep their footing; to hurl grapnels into the rampart; to shoot off their quarrels and arrows.

'You must be quick, Frenchmen,' shouted Hereward in derision, 'if you mean to come on board here.'

The French knew that well: and as Hereward spoke, two panels in the front of the sow creaked on their hinges, and dropped landward, forming two drawbridges, over which reeled to the attack a close body of knights, mingled with soldiers bearing scaling ladders.

They recoiled. Between the ends of the drawbridges and the foot of the rampart was some two fathoms' breadth of black ooze. The catastrophe which The Wake had foreseen was come, and a shout of derision arose from the unseen defenders above.

'Come on, leap it like men! Send back for your horses, knights, and ride them at it like bold huntsmen!'

The front rank could not but rush on, for the pressure behind forced them forward, whether they would or not. In a moment they were wallowing waist deep, trampled on; disappearing under their struggling comrades, who disappeared in their turn.

'Look, Torfrida! If they plant their scaling ladders, it will be on a foundation of their comrades' corpses.'

Torfrida gave one glance through the openings of the hoarding upon the writhing mass below, and turned away in horror. The men were not so merciful. Down between the hoarding beams rained stones, javelins, arrows, increasing the agony and death. The scaling ladders would not stand in the mire, if they had stood a moment, the struggles of the dying would have thrown them down. And still fresh victims pressed on from behind, shouting 'On to the gold of Ely!' and still the sow, under the weight, slipped farther and farther back into the stream, and the foul gulf widened between besiegers and besieged.

At last one scaling ladder was planted upon the bodies of the dead, and hooked firmly on the gunwale of the hoarding. Ere it could be hurled off again by the English,

it was so crowded with men that even Hereward's strength was insufficient to lift it off. He stood at the top, ready to hew down the first comer; and he hewed him down.

But the French were not to be daunted. Man after man dropped dead from the ladder top,—man after man took his place, sometimes scrambling over each other's backs.

The English, even in the insolence of victory, cheered them with honest admiration. 'You are fellows worth fighting, you French!'

'So we are,' shouted a knight, the first and last who crossed that parapet; for, thrusting Hereward back with a blow of his sword-hilt, he staggered past him over the hoarding, and fell on his knees.

A dozen men were upon him: but he was up again and shouting—

'To me, men-at-arms! A Deda! A Deda!' But no man answered.

'Yield!' quoth Hereward.

Sir Deda answered by a blow on Hereward's helmet, which felled The Wake to his knees, and broke the sword into twenty splinters.

'Well hit!' said Hereward, as he rose. 'Don't touch him, men! this is my quarrel now. Yield, sir! you have done enough for your honour. It is madness to throw away your life.'

The knight looked round on the fierce ring of faces, in the midst of which he stood alone.

'To none but The Wake'

'The Wake am I.'

'Ah,' said the knight, 'had I but hit a little harder!'

'You would have broke your sword into more splinters. My armour is enchanted. So yield like a reasonable and valiant man.'

'What care I?' said the knight, stepping on to the earth-work, and sitting down quietly. 'I vowed to St. Mary and King William that into Ely I would get this day, and in Ely I am; so I have done my work.'

‘And now you shall taste—as such a gallant knight deserves—the hospitality of Ely.’

It was Torfrida who spoke.

‘My husband’s prisoners are mine; and I, when I find them such gallant knights as you are, have no lighter chains for them than that which a lady’s bower can afford.’

Sir Deda was going to make an equally courteous answer, when over and above the shouts and curses of the combatants rose a yell so keen, so dreadful, as made all hurry forward to the rampart.

That which The Wake had foreseen was come at last. The bridge, strained more and more by its living burden, and by the falling tide, had parted,—not at the Ely end, where the sliding of the sow took off the pressure,—but at the end nearest the camp. One sideway roll it gave, and then, turning over, engulfed in that foul stream the flower of Norman chivalry; leaving a line—a full quarter of a mile in length—of wretches drowning in the dark water, or, more hideous still, in the bottomless slime of peat and mud.

Thousands are said to have perished. Their armour and weapons were found at times by delvers and dykers for centuries after; are found at times unto this day, beneath the rich drained cornfields which now fill up that black half-mile.

*Grapnels.* Irons shaped like small anchors.

*Quarrels.* Arrows with square heads.

*Delvers* Men who dig.

## CHAPTER XLIII

### HOW HERWARD PLAYED THE POTTER (1)

THEY of Ely were now much straitened, being shut in both by land and water, and what was to be done, either by themselves or by the king, they knew not. Would William simply starve them; or at least inflict on them so

perpetual a Lent—for of fish there could be no lack, even if they ate or drove away all the fowl—as would tame down their proud spirits; which a diet of fish and vegetables was supposed to do? Or was he gathering vast armies, from they knew not whence, to try, once and for all, another assault on the island—it might be from several points at once?

They must send out a spy, and find out news from the outer world, if news were to be gotten. But who would go?

So asked the bishop, and the abbot, and the earls, in council in the abbot's lodging.

Torfrida was among them. She was always among them now. She was their wise woman, whose counsels all received as more than human.

'I will go,' said she 'I will cut off my hair, and put on boy's clothes, and smurche myself brown with walnut-leaves; and I will go. I can talk their French tongue. I know their French ways; and as for a story to cover my journey and my doings, trust a woman's wit to invent that.'

They looked at her, with delight in her courage, but with doubt.

'If William's French grooms got hold of you, Torfrida, it would not be a little walnut-brown which would hide you,' said Hereward. 'But it is like you to offer—worthy of you, who have no peer.'

'That she has not,' quoth churchmen and soldiers alike.

'Nevertheless—to send you would be to send The Wake's praying half, and that would be bad religion. The Wake's fighting half is going, while you pray here as well as watch.'

'Uncle, uncle!' said the young earls, 'send Winter, send any of your good men—but not yourself. If we lose you, we lose our head and our king'

And all begged Hereward to let any man go, rather than himself.

'I am going, lords and knights; and what Hereward says he does. It is one day to Brandon. It may be two



days back ; for if I miscarry—as I most likely shall—I must come home round about On the fourth day, you shall hear of me or from me Come with me, Torfrida.’

And he strode out.

He cropped his golden locks, he cropped his golden beard ; and Torfrida wept, as she cropped them, half with fear for him, half for sorrow over his shorn glories

‘I am no Samson, my lady ; my strength lieth not in my locks. Now for some rascal’s clothes—as little dirty as you can get me, for fear of company.’

And Hereward put on filthy garments ; and taking mare Swallow with him, got into a barge and went across the river to Soham.

He could not go down the Great Ouse, and up the Little Ouse, which was his easiest way, for the French held all the river below the isle, and, besides, to have come straight from Ely might cause suspicion. So he went down to Fordham, and crossed the Lark at Mildenhall ; and just before he got to Mildenhall, he met a potter carrying pots upon a pony.

‘Halt, my stout churl,’ quoth he, ‘and put thy pots on my mare’s back.’

‘The man who wants them must fight for them,’ quoth that stout churl, raising a heavy staff.

‘Then here is he that will,’ quoth Hereward ; and, jumping off his mare, he twisted the staff out of the potter’s hands, and knocked him down therewith.

‘That will teach thee to know an Englishman when thou seest him.’

‘I have met my master,’ quoth the churl, rubbing his head. ‘But dog does not eat dog, and it is hard to be robbed by an Englishman, after being robbed a dozen times by the French.’

‘I will not rob thee. There is a silver penny for thy pots and thy coat—for that I must have likewise. And if thou tellest to mortal man aught about this, I will find those who will cut thee up for dogs’ meat ; but if not, then turn thy horse’s head and ride back to Ely, if thou

canst cross the water, and say what has befallen thee; and thou wilt find there an abbot who will give thee another penny for thy news.'

So Hereward took the pots, and the potter's clay-greased coat, and went on through Mildenhall, crying, after the manner of potters, in the English tongue, 'Pots ! pots ! good pots and pans !'

But when he got through Mildenhall, and well into the rabbit-warrens, he gave mare Swallow a kick, and went over the heath so fast northward, that his pots danced such a dance as broke half of them before he got to Brandon

'Never mind,' quoth he, 'they will think that I have sold them.' And when he neared Brandon he pulled up, sorted his pots, kept the whole ones, threw the shreds at the rabbits, and walked on into Brandon solemnly, leading the mare, and crying 'Pots !'

So lean and ill-looking was that famous mare that no one would suspect her splendid powers, or take her for anything but a potter's nag, when she was caparisoned in proper character. Hereward felt thoroughly at home in his part; as able to play the Englishman which he was by rearing, as the Frenchman which he was by education. He was full of heart and happy. He enjoyed the keen fresh air of the warrens; he enjoyed the ramble out of the isle, in which he had been cooped up so long, he enjoyed the jest of the thing—disguise, stratagem, adventure, danger. And so did the English, who adored him. None of The Wake's crafty deeds is told so carefully and lovingly; and none, doubt it not, was so often sung in after years by farm-house hearths, or in the outlaws' lodge, as this. Robin Hood himself may have trolled out many a time, in doggrel strain, how Hereward played the potter.

And he came to Brandon, to the 'king's court,' from which William could command the streams of Wissey and Little Ouse, with all their fens, and saw with a curse the new buildings of Weeting Castle. 'New, and strong, and cruel in their strength—how the Englishman must have

loathed the damp smell of the fresh mortar, and the sight of the heaps of rubble, and the chippings of the stone, and the blurring of the lime upon the green sward; and how hopeless he must have felt when the great gates opened, and the wains were drawn in, heavily laden with the salted beeves, and the sacks of corn and meal furnished by the royal demesnes, the manors which had belonged to Edward the Confessor, now the spoil of the stranger: and when he looked into the castle court, thronged by the soldiers in bright mail, and heard the carpenters working upon the ordnance—every blow and stroke, even of the hammer or mallet, speaking the language of defiance.’

These things The Wake saw and felt, like others, hopeless for the moment. And there rang in his ears his own message to William. ‘When thou art king of all England, I will put my hands between thine, and be thy man.’

‘He is not king of all England yet!’ thought he again; and drew himself up so proudly, that one passing by jeered him—

‘There goes a bold swaggerer enough, to be selling pots abroad.’ The Wake slouched his shoulders; and looked as mean a churl as ever. Next he cast about for a night’s lodging, for it was dark.

*Smuch.* Besmear.

*Samson.* A famous hero of the Hebrews; whose strength left him when his long hair was cut off.

*Caparison.* To put harness or trappings on to a horse.

*Trolled* Sung.

*Doggrel strain.* Rough unfinished verses.

*Demesnes* Estates.

*Ordnance.* Implements of war.

## CHAPTER XLIV

### HOW HEReward PLAYED THE POTTER (2)

OUTSIDE the town was a wretched cabin of mud and turf—such a one as Irish folk live in to this day; and

Hereward said to himself, 'This is bad enough to be good enough for me.'

So he knocked at the door; and knocked till it was opened and a hideous old crone put out her head.

'Who wants to see me at this time of night?'

'Any one would, who had heard how beautiful you are. Do you want any pots?'

'Pots? What have I to do with pots, thou saucy fellow? I thought it was some one wanting a charm.' And she shut the door.

'A charm?' thought Hereward. 'Maybe she can tell me news, if she be a witch. They are shrewd souls, these witches, and know more than they tell. And if I can get any news, I care not if Satan brings it in person.'

So he knocked again, till the old woman looked out once more, and bade him angrily be off.

'But I am belated here, good dame, and afraid of the French. And I will give thee the best bit of clay on my mare's back—pot—pan—crook—jug, or what thou wilt, for a night's lodging.'

'Have you any little jars—jars no longer than my hand?' asked she; for she used them in her trade, and had broken one of late: but to pay for one, she had neither money nor mind. So she agreed to let Hereward sleep there, for the value of two jars.—'But what of that ugly brute of a horse of thine?'

'She will do well enough in the turf-shed.'

'Then thou must pay with a pan.'

'Ugh!' groaned Hereward; 'thou drivest a hard bargain, for an Englishwoman, with a poor Englishman.'

'How knowest thou that I am English?'

'So much the better if thou art not,' thought Hereward, and bargained with her for a pan against a lodging for the horse in the turf-house, and a bottle of bad hay.

Then he went in, bringing his panniers with him with ostentatious care.

'Thou canst sleep there on the rushes. I have nought to give thee to eat.'

'Nought needs nought,' said Hereward, threw himself down on a bundle of rush, and in a few minutes snored loudly.

But he was never less asleep. He looked round the whole place; and he listened to every word.

The devil, as usual, was a bad paymaster; for the witch's cabin seemed only somewhat more miserable than that of other old women. The floor was mud, the rafters unceiled; the stars shone through the turf roof. The only hint of her trade was a hanging shelf, on which stood five or six little earthen jars, and a few packets of leaves. A parchment, scrawled with characters which the owner herself probably did not understand, hung against the cob wall; and a human skull—probably used only to frighten her patients—dangled from the roof-tree.

But in a corner, stuck against the wall, was something which chilled Hereward's blood a little;—a dried human hand, which he knew must have been stolen off the gallows, gripping in its fleshless fingers a candle, which he knew was made of human fat. That candle, he knew, duly lighted and carried, would enable the witch to walk unseen into any house on earth, yea, through the court of King William himself, while it drowned all men in preternatural slumber.

Hereward was very much frightened. He believed devoutly in the powers of a witch.

So he trembled on his rushes, and wished himself safe through that adventure, without being turned into a hare or a wolf.

'I would sooner be a wolf than a hare, of course: but—who comes here?'

And to the first old crone, who sat winking her bleared eyes, and warming her bleared hands over a little heap of peat in the middle of the cabin, entered another crone, if possible uglier.

'Two of them! If I am not roasted and eaten this night, I am a lucky man.'

And Hereward crossed himself devoutly

‘Well, how have you sped? Have you seen the king?’

‘No; but Ivo Taillebois. Eh? Who the foul fiend have you lying there?’

‘Only an English brute. He cannot understand us. Talk on. only don’t wake the hog. Have you got the gold?’

‘Never mind’

Then there was a grumbling and a quarrelling, from which Hereward understood that the gold was to be shared between them.

‘But it is a bit of a chain. To cut it will spoil it.’

The other insisted, and he heard them chop the gold chain in two.

‘And is this all?’

‘I had work enough to get that. He said, no play no pay; and he would give it me after the isle was taken. But I told him my spirit was a Jewish spirit, that used to serve Solomon the Wise, and he would not serve me, much less come over the sea from Normandy, unless he smelt gold, for he loved it like any Jew.’

‘And what did you tell him then?’

‘That the king must go back to Aldreth again; for only from thence would he take the isle; for—and that was true enough—I dreamt I saw all the water of Aldreth full of wolves, clambering over into the island on each other’s backs.’

‘That means that some of them will be drowned.’

‘Let them drown. I left him to find out that part of the dream himself. Then I told him how he must make another causeway, bigger and stronger than the last, and a tower on which I could stand and curse the English. And I promised him to bring a storm right in the faces of the English, so that they could neither fight nor see.’

‘But if the storm does not come?’

‘It will come. I know the signs of the sky—who better?—and the weather will break up in a week. Therefore I told him he must begin his works at once, before the rain came on; and that we would go and ask

the guardian of the well to tell us the fortunate day for attacking.'

'That is my business,' said the other; 'and my spirit likes the smell of gold as well as yours. Little you would have got from me, if you had not given me half the chain.'

Then the two rose.

'Let us see whether the English hog is asleep.'

One of them came and listened to Hereward's breathing, and put her hand upon his chest. His hair stood on end, a cold sweat came over him. But he snored more loudly than ever.

The two old crones went out satisfied. Then Hereward rose, and glided after them.

They went down a meadow to a little well, which Hereward had marked as he rode thither hung round with bits of rag and flowers, as similar 'holy wells' are decorated in Ireland to this day.

He hid behind a hedge, and watched them stooping over the well, mumbling he knew not what of cantrips.

Then there was a silence, and a tinkling sound as of water.

'Once—twice—thrice,' counted the witches. Nine times he counted the tinkling sound.

'The ninth day—the ninth day, and the king shall take Ely,' said one in a cracked scream, rising and shaking her fist towards the isle.

Hereward was more than half-minded to have put his dagger—the only weapon which he had—into the two old beldames. But the fear of an outcry kept him still. He had found out already so much, that he was determined to find out more. So to-morrow he would go up to the court itself, and take what luck sent.

He slipped back to the cabin, and lay down again; and as soon as he had seen the two old crones safe asleep, fell asleep himself, and was so tired that he laid till the sun was high.

'Get up!' screamed the old dame at last, kicking him,

'or I shall make you give me another crock for a double night's rest.'

He paid his lodging, put the panniers on the mare, and went on crying pots.

*Pieteratural.* Beyond what is natural

*Crone.* An old woman.

*Guardian of the well* The spirit or fairy who was supposed to have the well in its charge

*Cantrips.* Magical sayings, partly muttered and partly sung.

*Beldame.* A horrible woman.

## CHAPTER XLV

### HOW HEReward CHEATED THE KING (1)

WHEN he came to the outer gateway of the court, he tied up the mare, and carried the crockery in on his own back boldly. The scullions saw him; and called him into the kitchen to see his crockery, without the least intention of paying for what they took.

A man of rank belonging to the court came in, and stared fixedly at Hereward.

'You are mightily like that villain Hereward, man,' quoth he.

'Anon?' asked Hereward, looking as stupid as he could.

'Bring him into the hall,' quoth another; 'and let us see if any man knows him.'

Into the great hall he was brought, and stared at by knights and squires. He bent his knees, rounded his shoulders, and made himself look as mean as he could.

Ivo Taillebois and Earl Warrenne came down and had a look at him.

'Does any one here talk English? Let us question the fellow,' said Earl Warrenne.

'Hereward? Hereward? Who wants to know about that villain?' answered the potter, as soon as he was asked



in English. 'Would to heaven he were here, and I could see some of you noble knights and earls paying him for me; for I owe him more than ever I shall pay myself.'

'What does he mean?'

'He came out of the isle ten days ago, nigh on to evening, and drove off a cow of mine and four sheep, which was all my living, noble knights, save these pots.'

'And where is he since?'

'In the isle, my lords, well-nigh starved, and his folk falling away from him daily, from hunger and ague-fits. I doubt if there be a hundred sound men left in Ely.'

'Take this babbler into the kitchen, and feed him,' quoth Earl Warrenne; and so the colloquy ended.

Into the kitchen again the potter went. The king's luncheon was preparing; so he listened to the chatter; and picked up this, at least, which was valuable to him that the witches' story was true; that a great attack would be made from Aldreth: that boats had been ordered up the river to Cotinglade, and pioneers and entrenching tools were to be sent on that day to the old causeway.

But soon he had to take care of himself. Earl Warrenne's commands to feed him were construed by the cook-boys and scullions into a command to make him drunk likewise. To make a laughing-stock of an Englishman was too tempting a jest to be resisted, and Hereward was drenched with wine and beer, and sorely baited and badgered. At last one rascal hit upon a notable plan.

'Pluck out the English hog's hair and beard, and put him blindfold in the midst of his pots, and see what a smash we shall have.'

Hereward pretended not to understand the words, which were spoken in French; but when they were interpreted to him, he grew somewhat red about the ears.

Submit he would not. But if he defended himself, and made an uproar in the king's court, he might very likely find himself riding Odin's horse before the hour was out. However, happily for him, the wine and beer had

made him stout of heart, and when one fellow laid hold of his beard, he resisted sturdily.

The man struck him, and that hard. Hereward, hot of temper, and careless of life, struck him again, right under the ear.

The fellow dropped for dead.

Up leapt cook-boys, scullions, and all the foul-mouthed rascality of a great mediæval household, and attacked Hereward with forks and flesh-hooks.

Then was Hereward aware of a great broach, or spit, before the fire; and recollecting how he had used such an one as a boy against the monks of Peterborough, was minded to use it against the cooks of Brandon, which he did so heartily, that in a few moments he had killed one, and driven the others backward in a heap.

But his case was hopeless. He was soon overpowered by numbers from outside, and dragged into the hall, to receive judgment for the mortal crime of slaying a man within the precincts of the court.

He kept up heart. He knew that the king was there; he knew that he should most likely get justice from the king. If not, he could but discover himself, and so save his life, for that William would kill him willingly, he did not believe.

So he went in boldly and willingly, and up the hall, where, on the dais, stood William the Norman.

William had finished his luncheon, and was standing at the board-side. A page held water in a silver basin, in which he was washing his hands. Two more knelt, and laced his long boots; for he was, as always, going a-hunting.

Then Hereward looked at the face of the great man, and felt at once that it was the face of the greatest man whom he had ever met.

‘I am not that man’s match,’ said he to himself. ‘Perhaps it will all end in being his man, and he my master.’

‘Silence, knaves!’ said William, ‘and speak one of you at a time. How came this?’



Then Howard looked at the face of the great man 'I am not that man's underling,' said he to himself — Page 191

'A likely story, forsooth!' said he, when he had heard A poor English potter comes into my court, and murders my men under my very eyes for mere sport. I do not believe you, rascals! You, churl,' and he spoke through an English interpreter, 'tell me your tale, and justice you shall have or take, as you deserve. I am the King of England, man, and I know your tongue, though I speak it not yet, more pity.'

Hereward fell on his knees.

'If you are indeed my lord the king, then I am safe; for there is justice in you. at least so all men say' And he told his tale manfully.

'This is a far likelier story, and I believe it. Hark you, you ruffians! Here am I, trying to conciliate these English by justice and mercy, whenever they will let me: and here are you outraging them, and driving them mad and desperate, just that you may get a handle against them, and thus rob the poor wretches and drive them into the forest. From the lowest to the highest—from Ivo Taillebois there, down to you cook-boys—you are all at the same game. And I will stop it! The next time I hear of outrage to unarmed man or harmless woman, I will hang that culprit, were he Odo my brother himself'

This excellent speech was enforced with oaths so strange and terrible, that Ivo Taillebois shook in his boots; and the chaplain prayed fervently that the roof might not fall in on their heads.

'Thou smilest, man?' said William quickly, to the kneeling Hereward. 'So thou understandest French?'

'A few words only, most gracious king, which we potters pick up, wandering everywhere with our wares,' said Hereward, speaking in French, for so keen was William's eye, that he thought it safer to play no tricks with him.

'Look you,' said William, 'you are no common churl, you have fought too well for that. Let me see your arm.' Hereward drew up his sleeve.

'Potters do not carry sword-scars like those, neither

are they tattooed like English thanes. Hold up thy head, man, and let us see thy throat.'

Hereward, who had carefully hung down his head to prevent his throat-patterns being seen, was forced to lift it up.

'Aha! So I expected. There is fair ladies' work there. Is not this he who was said to be so like Hereward? Very good. Put him in ward till I come back from hunting. But do him no harm. For'—and William fixed on Hereward eyes of the most intense intelligence—'were he Hereward himself, I should be right glad to see Hereward safe and sound; my man at last, and earl of all between Humber and the fens'

But Hereward did not rise at the bait. With a face of stupid and ludicrous terror, he made reply in broken French.

'Have mercy, mercy, lord king! Make not that fiend earl over us. Even Ivo Taillebois there would be better than he. Send him to be earl over the imps in hell, or over the wild Welsh who are worse still but not over us, good lord king, whom he hath polled and peeled till we are——'

'Silence!' said William, laughing, as did all round him. 'Thou art a cunning rogue enough, whoever thou art. Go into limbo, and behave thyself till I come back'

'All saints send your grace good sport, and thereby me a good deliverance,' quoth Hereward, who knew that his fate might depend on the temper in which William returned. So he was thrust into an outhouse, and there locked up.

He sat on an empty barrel, meditating on the chances of his submitting to the king after all, when the door opened, and in strode one with a drawn sword in one hand, and a pair of leg-shackles in the other.

'Hold out thy shins, fellow! Thou art not going to sit at thine ease there like an abbot, after killing one of us grooms, and bringing the rest of us into disgrace. Hold out thy legs, I say!'

'Nothing easier,' quoth Hereward cheerfully, and held out a leg. But when the man stooped to put on the fetters, he received a kick which sent him staggering.

After which he recollected very little, at least in this world. For Hereward cut off his head with his own sword.

After which (says the chronicler) he broke away out of the house, and over garden walls and palings, hiding and running, till he got to the front gate, and leaped upon mare Swallow.

*Scullions.* Servants who clean pots and kettles.

*Anon?* An interjection implying that the speaker's words have not been understood.

*Colloquy.* Discourse of two or more persons

*Construed* Interpreted, understood.

*Precincts* A place enclosed within certain limits.

*Dais* A raised platform.

*Thanes.* English nobles.

*Polled and peeled.* Stripped and plundered.

*Lumbo.* In captivity.

## CHAPTER XLVI

### HOW HEREWARD CHEATED THE KING (2)

THEN he shook up mare Swallow, and with one great shout of 'A Wake! A Wake!' rode for his life, with knights and squires (for the hue and cry was raised) galloping at her heels.

Who then were astonished but those knights, as they saw the ugly potter's garron gaining on them, length after length, till she and her rider had left them far behind?

Who then was proud but Hereward, as the mare tucked her great thighs under her, and swept on over heath and rabbit-burrow, over rush and fen, sound ground and rotten all alike to that enormous stride, to that keen bright eye which foresaw every footfall, to that raking shoulder which picked her up again at every stagger?

Hereward laid the bridle on her neck, and let her go. Fall she could not, and tire she could not; and he half wished she might go on for ever. Where could a man be better, than on a good horse, with all the cares of this life blown away out of his brains by the keen air which rushed round his temples? And he galloped on, as cheery as a boy, shouting at the rabbits as they scuttled from under his feet, and laughing at the dottrel as they postured and anticked on the mole hills.

But when he got through Mildenhall, he began to think how he should get home to Ely.

The hue and cry would be out against him. The ports and ferries to the east of the isle as far south as Cambridge would be guarded, and all the more surely, on account of the approaching attack. True, he knew many a path and ford which the French could not know, but he feared to trust himself in the labyrinth of fens and meres, with a mob of pursuers at his heels. A single mistake might pound him among morasses, and force him, even if he escaped himself through the reeds, to leave the mare behind. And to do that was shame and loss intolerable. No. Mare Swallow, for her own sake, must do a deed that day.

He would go south by the Roman roads. He would go right round the fens; round Cambridge itself; into the western forests. There he could he hid till some friend at Somersham or Earith should ferry him over to the western side of the isle. The distance was great; well-nigh fifty miles: but the land was light and sound, and the going safe and good. It must be done. It should be done.

He gathered the mare together, as he rose the slope of Kennet Heath. She was going steadily and soundly, breathing like a sleeping child. His pursuers were two miles behind, black dots among the barrows on Barton hill. He had time to rest her; and trotted on steadily, keeping to the uplands and the high road, from whence he could see far and wide over the land.

On by Newmarket Heath—nameless and desert then—

over smooth chalk turf ; through glades of fern and thorn ; past barrows where slept the heroes of old times, Briton, Roman, Saxon, Dane, forefathers of his own, perhaps, among them. Ay—that was the place for a hero to sleep in. Not choked in a minster charnel-house, amid green damp and droning monks · but out under the free sky, with his weapons round him, his horse, his dog, the antlers of his game ; where he might come up out of his barrow on moonlight nights, and stare at the flying clouds, and scent the rushing breeze. Ah, that he could be buried there : but then Torfrida—he should like to lie by her.

He was at the Rech-dyke now · and warily he looked eastward, as he led the mare up the steep bank, for French scouts between him and the fens. but none were within sight.

He paused upon the top of that great earthwork. Dangerous as it was to stop in that exposed height, making himself a beacon against the sky, he could not but look down, and back, at all which remained of free English soil.

He looked down over Swaffham, Quy, and Waterbeach, and the rest of the tree-embowered hamlets which fringed the fen, green knolls on the shore of a boundless sea of pale-blue mist ; and above that sea, to the far north, a line of darker blue, which was the sacred isle. As the sun sank lower, higher rose the mist ; and the isle grew more and more faint, vaporous, dreamy, as fen-distances are wont to be. Was it not about to fade away in reality ; to become a vapour, and a dream, and leave him alone and free ? Earls, knights, housecarles, monks, seemed all becoming phantoms, fading with their fading cause. Was it worth while to fight, to die, for them, for anything ? What was William to him ? What was England ? Why play out the lost game to the last ? Why not leave all behind, and ride down south—to the sea—the free sea, and the wild joys of the Viking's life ? And he led the mare down the Rech-dyke, and up again on to the down, faltering, stopping, his head sunken on his breast, his heart sunken within.



But Torfrida—Torfrida and the little girl. They at least were not phantoms. They could not vanish, could not even die—to him. His they were for ever. What fiend had been putting boy's dreams into his head?

And he sprang hastily into the saddle, as one that flees from a temptation. 'Home, mare! Home to prison again! We have been out far too long, old lass! too long.'

He held on over the Fleam-dyke: but he feared to turn downwards into the Cambridge flats, and kept his vantage-ground upon the downs, till, on the top of the Gogmagog, he struck the old Roman road, which men call 'Wort's Causeway' at this day. Down that he turned, short to the right, toward the green meadows, and the long line of mighty elms, and the little village which clustered, unconscious of its coming glories, beneath the new French keep, beside the Roman bridge.

The setting sun gilded the white flints of the keep, and Hereward looked on them with a curse. But it gilded, too, the tree tops of the great forest beyond, and Hereward uttered something like a prayer to St. Etheldreda. For if he could but reach that forest, he was safe.

The Wake was, of course, too wise to go through Cambridge street, under the eyes of the French garrison. But he saw that the Roman road led straight to a hamlet some mile above the town; and at the road end, he guessed, there must be either a bridge or a ford. There he could cross the Cam. And he rode slowly downward, longing for it to grow dark, and saving the mare, in case she should be needed for a sudden rush.

And a rush was soon needed. For on the hill behind him he saw armour glitter in the red light; and a brace of knights. They paused for a moment; and then espied him. One galloped down the road toward him; the other spurred to the right, straight for Cambridge.

'I shall have the whole pack of wolves out, and on me, in half an hour,' thought Hereward; and struck spurs into the mare.

Into the ford he dashed, making more splash than ever

did geese in Shelford Fen<sup>\*</sup>; and out again, and on to the wold, and away for the black wall of oak, and ash and elm.

And as he entered the forest at Madingley, he rose in his stirrups, with a shout of 'A Wake! A Wake!' which was heard, for aught he cared, in Cambridge castle.

And so through the forest, by a clear moonlight, he came in the early morning to the Isle Somersham, which was then all deep wood, and was ferried over at Earith by one of his many friends into the isle of Ely.

*Dottrel.* A kind of plover.

*Labyrinth.* A place full of windings.

*Pound.* To catch as if in a trap.

*Charnel-house* A place for the bones of the dead.

*Rech-dyke* Also known as the Devil's dyke, it stretches from the village of Rech or Reach across Newmarket Heath. The bank beside the ditch is 18 feet high.

*Fleam-dyke* Seven miles west of and parallel with the Rech-dyke

*Gogmagog.* A range of hills to the south of Cambridge.

*Little village.* Cambridge.

*Its coming glories.* The fame that has attached to it since it has been the seat of one of the greatest universities in the world

*St Etheldreda.* The daughter of a king of East Anglia, born about 630 She received the Isle of Ely as her wedding gift; and leaving her husband in order to follow a holy life, founded a religious house at Ely, where is now a famous cathedral She died in 679.

## CHAPTER XLVII

### HOW THEY FOUGHT AGAIN AT ALDRETH (1)

HEREWARD came back in fear and trembling after all He believed in the magic powers of the witch of Brandon, and he asked Torfrida, in his simplicity, whether she was not cunning enough to defeat her spells by counter spells

Torfrida smiled and shook her head.

'My knight, I have long since given up such vanities.

Let us not fight evil with evil, but rather with good. Better are prayers than charms; for the former are heard in heaven above, and the latter only in the pit below. Let me and all the women of Ely go rather in procession to St. Etheldreda's well, there above the fort at Aldreth, and pray St. Etheldreda to be with us when the day shall come; and defend her own isle, and the honour of us women who have taken refuge in her holy arms.'

So all the women of Ely walked out barefoot to St. Etheldreda's well, with Torfrida at their head, clothed in sackcloth, and with fetters on her wrists, and waist, and ankles; which she vowed, after the strange, sudden, earnest fashion of those times, never to take off again till she saw the French host flee from Aldreth before the face of St. Etheldreda. So they prayed, while Hereward and his men worked at the forts below. And when they came back, and Torfrida was washing her feet, sore and bleeding from her pilgrimage, Hereward came in.

'You have murdered your poor soft feet, and taken nothing thereby, I fear.'

'I have. If I had walked on sharp razors all the way, I would have done it gladly, to know what I know now. As I prayed I looked out over the fen; and St. Etheldreda put a thought into my heart. But it is so terrible a one, that I fear to tell it to you. And yet it seems our only chance.'

Hereward threw himself at her feet, and prayed her to tell. At last she spoke, as one half afraid of her own words.

'Will the reeds burn, Hereward?'

Hereward kissed her feet again and again, calling her his prophetess, his saviour.

'Burn! yes, like tinder, in this March wind, if the drought only holds. Pray that the drought may hold, Torfrida.'

'There, there, say no more. How hard-hearted war makes even us women! There, help me to take off this rough sackcloth, and dress myself again.'

Meanwhile William had moved his army again to Cambridge, and on to Willingham-field. Then he began to rebuild his causeway, broader and stronger; and commanded all the fishermen of the Ouse to bring their boats to Cotinglade, and ferry over his materials. 'Among whom came Hereward in a very narrow canoe, with head and beard shaven lest he should be known, and worked diligently among the rest. But the sun did not set that day without mischief, for before Hereward went off, he finished his work by setting the whole on fire, so that it was all burnt, and some of the French killed and drowned.'

And so The Wake went on, with stratagems and ambushes, till 'after seven days' continual fighting, they had hardly done one day's work; but on the eighth day they determined to attack the isle, putting in the midst of them that pythonesse woman on a high place, where she might be safe freely to exercise her art.'

It was not Hereward alone who had entreated Torfrida to exercise her magic art in their behalf. But she steadily refused; and made the abbot support her refusal by a strict declaration, that he would have no fiend's games played in Ely, as long as he was abbot alive on land.

Torfrida, meanwhile, grew utterly wild. Her conscience smote her, in spite of her belief that St. Etheldreda had inspired her, at the terrible resource which she had hinted to her husband, and which she knew well he would carry out with terrible success. Pictures of agony and death floated before her eyes, and kept her awake at night. She watched long hours in the church in prayer; she fasted; she disciplined her tender body with sharp pains, she tried, after the fashion of those times, to atone for her sin, if sin it was. At last she had worked herself up into a religious frenzy. She saw St. Etheldreda in the clouds, towering over the isle, menacing the French host. She uttered wild prophecies of ruin and defeat to the French, and then, when her frenzy collapsed, moaned secretly of ruin and defeat hereafter to themselves. But she would be bold; she would play her part, she would encourage

the heroes who looked to her as one inspired, wiser and loftier than themselves.

And so it befell, that when the men marched down to Haddenham that afternoon, Torfrida rode at their head on a white charger, robed from throat to ankle in sackcloth, her fetters clanking on her limbs. But she called on the English to see in her the emblem of England captive yet unconquered; and to break her fetters, and the worse fetters of every woman in England who was the toy and slave of the brutal invaders; and so fierce a triumph sparkled from her wild hawk-eyes that the Englishmen looked up to her weird beauty as to that of an inspired saint; and when the French came on to the assault there stood on the grassy mound behind the English fort a figure clothed in sackcloth, barefooted and bareheaded, with fetters shining on waist, and wrist, and ankle—her long black locks streaming in the wind, her long white arms stretched cross-wise toward heaven, in imitation of Moses of old above the battle with Amalek; invoking St. Etheldreda and all the powers of heaven, and chanting doom and defiance to the invaders.

And the English looked on her, and cried, 'She is a prophetess! We will surely do some great deed this day, or die around her feet like heroes!'

And opposite to her, upon the French tower, the old hag of Brandon howled and gibbered with filthy gestures, calling for the thunderstorm which did not come, for all above the sky was cloudless blue.

And the English saw and felt, though they could not speak it, dumb nation as they were, the contrast between the spirit of cruelty and darkness, and the spirit of freedom and light.

So strong was the new bridge, that William trusted himself upon it on horseback, with Ivo Taillebois at his side.

William doubted the powers of the witch, and felt rather ashamed of his new helpmate; but he was confident in his bridge, and in the heavy artillery which he had placed in his four towers.

Ivo Taillebois was utterly confident in his witch, and in the bridge likewise.

William waited for the rising of the tide; and when the tide was near its height, he commanded the artillery to open, and clear the fort opposite of the English. Then, with crash and twang, the great stones and heavy lances hurtled through the air.

'Back!' shouted Torfrida, raised almost to madness by fasting, self-torture, and religious frenzy. 'Out of yon fort, every man. Why waste your lives under that artillery? Stand still this day, and see how the saints of heaven shall fight for you.'

So utter was the reverence which she commanded for the moment, that every man drew back, and crowded round her feet outside the fort.

'The cowards are fleeing already. Let your men go, sir king!' shouted Taillebois.

'On to the assault! Strike for Normandy!' shouted William.

'I fear much,' said he to himself, 'that this is some stratagem of that Wake's. But conquered they must be.'

*Fetters.* Chains  
*Drought.* Absence of rain.  
*Pythoress* A priestess  
*Frenzy* Mad fury.  
*Hurtled.* Moved with violence.

## CHAPTER XLVIII

### HOW THEY FOUGHT AGAIN AT ALDRETH (2)

THE evening breeze curled up the reach. The great pike splashed out from the weedy shores, sending the whitefish flying in shoals into the low glare of the setting sun: and heeded not, stupid things, the barges packed with

mailed men, which swarmed in the reeds on either side the bridge, and began to push out into the river.

The starlings swung in thousands round the reeds, looking to settle in their wonted place : but dare not ; and rose and swung round again, telling each other, in their manifold pipings, how all the reeds teemed with mailed men. And all above, the sky was cloudless blue.

And then came a trample, a roll of many feet on the soft spongy peat, a low murmur which rose into wild shouts as a human tide poured along the causeway, and past the witch of Brandon Heath.

William laughed. 'Forward, men ' forward ' ' shouted he, riding out to the bridge-end, under the tower.

'Forward ' ' shouted Ivo Taillebois.

'Forward ' ' shouted the hideous hag overhead. 'The spirit of the well fights for you '

'Fight for yourselves,' said Willam.

There were fifty yards of deep clear water between Frenchman and Englishman Only fifty yards Not only the arrows and arblast quarrels, but heavy hand-javelins, flew across every moment ; every now and then a man toppled forward, and plunged into the blue depth among the eels and pike, to find his comrades of the summer before, and then the stream was still once more. The coots and waterhens swam in and out of the reeds, and wondered what it was all about. The water-lilies flapped upon the ripple, as lonely as in the loneliest mere But their floats were soon broken, their white cups stained with human gore. Fifty yards of deep clear water. And treasure inestimable to win by crossing it.

They thrust out barks, canoes, pontoons ; they crawled upon them like ants, and thrust out more yet beyond, heedless of their comrades, who slipped, and splashed, and sank, holding out vain hands to hands too busy to seize them And always the old witch jabbered overhead with her cantrips, pointing, mumming, praying for the storm ; while all above, the sky was cloudless blue.

And always on the mound opposite, while darts and

quarrels whistled round her head, stood Torfrida, pointing with outstretched scornful finger at the strugglers in the river, and chanting loudly what the Frenchmen could not tell: but it made their hearts, as it was meant to do, melt like wax within them.

'They have a counter witch to yours, Ivo, it seems; and a fairer one. I am afraid the devils are more likely to listen to her than to that old broomstick-rider aloft.'

'Fair is, that fair cause has, sir king.'

'A good argument for honest men, but none for fiends. What is the fair fiend pointing at so earnestly there?'

'Somewhat among the reeds. Hark to her now! She is singing, somewhat more like an angel than a fiend, I will say for her.'

And Torfrida's song, coming clear and sweet across the water, rose louder and shriller till it almost drowned the jabbering of the witch.

'She sees more than we do.'

'But I see!' cried William, smiting his hand upon his thigh. 'She has been showing them where to fire the reeds; and they have done it!'

A puff of smoke; a wisp of flame, and then another and another, and a canoe shot out from the reeds on the French shore, and glided into the reeds of the island.

'The reeds are on fire, men! Have a care,' shouted Ivo.

'Silence, fool! Frighten them once, and they will leap like sheep into that gulf. Men! right about! draw off—slowly and in order. We will attack again to-morrow.'

The cool voice of the great captain arose too late. A line of flame was leaping above the reed bed, crackling and howling before the evening breeze. The column on the causeway had seen their danger but too soon, and fled, but whither?

A shower of arrows, quarrels, javelins, fell upon the head of the column as it tried to face about and retreat, confusing it more and more. One arrow, shot by no common arm, went clean through William's shield, and



pinned it to the mailed flesh. He could not stifle a cry of pain.

'You are wounded, sire. Ride for your life! It is worth that of a thousand of these churls,' and Ivo seized William's bridle and dragged him, in spite of himself, through the cowering, shrieking, struggling crowd.

On came the flame, leaping and crackling, laughing and shrieking, like a live fiend. The archers and slingers in the boats cowered before it; and fell, scorched corpses, as it swept on. It reached the causeway, surged up, recoiled from the mass of human beings, then sprang over their heads and passed onwards, girding them with flame.

The reeds were burning around them; the timbers of the bridge caught fire; the peat and faggots smouldered beneath their feet. They sprang from the burning footway, and plunged into the fathomless bog, covering their faces and eyes with scorched hands; and then sank in the black gurgling slime.

Ivo dragged William on, regardless of curses and prayers from his soldiery, and they reached the shore just in time to see between them and the water a long black smouldering writhing line. the morass to right and left, which had been a minute before deep reed, an open smutty pool, dotted with boatsful of shrieking and cursing men, and at the causeway end the tower, with the flame climbing up its posts, and the witch of Brandon throwing herself desperately from the top, and falling dead upon the embers, a motionless heap of rags.

'Fool that thou art! Fool that I was!' cried the great king, as he rolled off his horse at his tent door, cursing with rage and pain.

Ivo Taillebois sneaked off; sent over to Brandon for the second witch; and hanged her, as some small comfort to his soul. Neither did he forget to search the cabin, till he found buried in a crock the bits of his own gold chain, and various other treasures, for which the wretched old women had bartered their souls. All which he confiscated to his own use, as a much-injured man.

The next day William withdrew his army. The men refused to face again that blood-stained pass. The English spells, they said, were stronger than theirs, and than the daring of brave men. Let William take Torfrida and burn her, as she had burnt them, with reeds out of Willingham fen : then might they try to storm Ely again.

Torfrida saw them turn, flee, die in agony. Her work was done, her passion exhausted; her self-torture, and the mere weight of her fetters, which she had sustained during her passion, weighed her down; she dropped senseless on the turf, and lay in a trance for many hours.

Then she arose, and, casting off her fetters and her sackcloth, was herself again: but a sadder woman till her dying day.

*Whitefish.* Small fish allied to the herring

*Teemed with.* Were full of.

*Arblast quarrels.* Arrows with square heads shot from the weapon called the arblast.

*Balks* Rafters

*Pontoons* Large movable bridges

*Crock* An earthen pot.

*Confiscated.* Seized as his own.

## CHAPTER XLIX

### HOW THE MONKS OF ELY DID AFTER THEIR KIND

[Acting on the advice of his chaplain, William sent word to the monks in Ely that unless they yielded within a week, all the lands and manors belonging to Ely which lay without the precincts of the isle, should be forfeited. At the same time a free pardon was offered to Hereward and his men, if they would surrender to William. This was the message sent by the Conqueror, but Ivo Taillebois and another, deadly enemies of Hereward, added to it that Torfrida was to be exempted from the pardon on account of her sorcery, and burned.]

WILLIAM'S bolt could not have fallen into Ely at a more propitious moment.

Hereward was away, with a large body of men and many ships, foraging in the north-eastern fens. He might not be back for a week.

Abbot Thurstan—for what cause is not said—had lost heart a little while before, and fled, taking with him the ornaments and treasure of the church.

Hereward had discovered his flight with deadly fear: but provisions he must have, and forth he must go, leaving Ely in charge of half a dozen independent English gentlemen, each of whom would needs have his own way, just because it was his own.

Only Torfrida he took, and put her hand into the hand of Sigtryg Ranaldsson, and said, 'Thou true comrade and perfect knight, as I did by thy wife, do thou by mine, if aught befall.'

And Sigtryg swore first by the white Christ, and then by the head of Odin's horse, that he would stand by Torfrida till the last; and then, if need was, slay her.

'You will not need, King Sigtryg. I can slay myself,' said she, as she took the Ost-Dane's hard honest hand.

And Hereward went; and then came the message; and all men in Ely knew it.

Torfrida stormed down to the monks, in honest indignation, to demand that they should send to William, and purge her of the calumny. She found the chapter-door barred and bolted. They were all gabbling inside, like starlings on a foggy morning, and would not let her in. She hurried back to Sigtryg, fearing treason, and foreseeing the effect of the message upon the monks.

But what could Sigtryg do? To find out their counsels was impossible for him, or any man in Ely. For the monks could talk Latin, and the men could not. Torfrida alone knew the sacred tongue.

If Torfrida could but listen at the key-hole. Well—all was fair in war. And to the chapter-house door she went, guarded by Sigtryg and some of his housecarles; and listened, with a beating heart.

'We are betrayed. They are going to send for the

abbot from Angerhale,' said Torfrida at last, reeling from the door. 'All is lost.'

'Shall we burst open the door and kill them all?' asked Sigtryg simply.

'No, king—no. They are God's men; and we have blood enough upon our souls.'

'We can keep the gates, lest any go out to the king.'

'Impossible. They know the isle better than we, and have a thousand arts.'

So all they could do was to wait in fear and trembling for Hereward's return, and send Martin Lightfoot off to warn him, wherever he might be.

The monks remained perfectly quiet. The organ droned, the chants wailed as usual; nothing interrupted the stated order of the services; and in the hall, each day, they met the knights as cheerfully as ever. Greed and superstition had made cowards of them—and now traitors.

It was whispered that Abbot Thurstan had returned to the minster: but no man saw him: and so three or four days went on.

Martin found Hereward after incredible labours, and told him all, clearly and shrewdly. The man's manifest insanity only seemed to quicken his wit, and increase his powers of bodily endurance.

Hereward was already on his way home; and never did he and his good men row harder than they rowed that day back to Sutton. He landed, and hurried on with half his men, leaving the rest to disembark the booty. He was anxious as to the temper of the monks. He foresaw all that Torfrida had foreseen. And as for Torfrida herself, he was half mad. Ivo Taillebois' addition to William's message had had its due effect. He vowed even deadlier hate against the Frenchman than he had ever felt before.

The sun was setting long before they reached Ely: but just as he sank into the western fen, Winter stopped, pointing—Was that the flash of arms? There, far away, just below Willingham town. Or was it the setting sun upon the ripple of some long water?

'There is not wind enough for such a ripple,' said one. But ere they could satisfy themselves, the sun was down, and all the fen was gray.

Hereward was still more uneasy. If that had been the flash of arms, it must have come off a very large body of men, moving in column, on the road between Cambridge and Ely. He hastened on his men. But ere they were within sight of the minster-tower, they were aware of a horse galloping violently towards them through the dusk. Hereward called a halt. He heard his own heart beat as he stopped. The horse was pulled up short among them. On its back was a lad, with a smaller boy behind him, clasping his waist.

'Hereward? Thank God, I am in time! And the child is safe too. Thanks, thanks, dear saints!' a voice sobbed out.

It was the voice of Torfrida

'Treason!' she gasped

'I knew it.'

'The French are in the island. They have got Aldreth. The whole army is marching from Cambridge. The whole fleet is coming up from Southrey. And you have time——'

'To burn Ely over the monks' heads. Men! Get bogwood out of yon cottage, make yourselves torches, and onward!'

Then rose a babel of questions, which Torfrida answered as she could. But she had nothing to tell. 'Clerks' cunning,' she said bitterly, 'was an overmatch for woman's wit.' She had sent out a spy: but he had not returned till an hour since. Then he came back breathless, with the news that the French army was on the march from Cambridge, and that, as he came over the water at Aldreth, he found a party of French knights in the fort on the Ely side, talking peaceably with the monks on guard.

She had run up to the borough hill, and one look to the north-east had shown her the river swarming with ships. She had rushed home, put boys' clothes on herself

and her child, hid a few jewels in her bosom, saddled Swallow, and ridden for life thither.

‘And King Sigtryg?’

He and his men had gone desperately out towards Haddenham, with what English they could muster: but all were in confusion. Some were getting the women and children into boats, to hide them in the reeds; others battering the minster gates, vowing vengeance on the monks.

‘Then Sigtryg will be cut off!’ Alas for the day that ever brought his brave heart hither!’

And when the men heard that, a yell of fury and despair burst from all throats.

*Bolt.* Threat.

*The calumny.* The accusation of sorcery.

*Incredible* Almost impossible to be believed.

*Manifest.* Plain or clear.

*Yon.* Yonder.

*Then Sigtryg will be cut off!* What became of him never was known.

## CHAPTER L

### HOW MARE SWALLOW FOUND HER REST

SHOULD they go back to their boats?

‘No! onward,’ cried Hereward. ‘Revenge first, and safety after. Let us leave nothing for the accursed Frenchmen but smoking ruins, and then gather our comrades, and cut our way back to the north.’

‘Good counsel,’ cried Winter. ‘We know the roads, and they do not; and in such a dark night as is coming, we can march out of the island without their being able to follow us a mile.’

They hurried on: but stopped once more, at the galloping of another horse.

‘Who comes, friend or foe?’

‘Alwyn, son of Orgar!’ cried a voice under breath. ‘Don’t make such a noise, men! The French are within half a mile of you.’

'Then one traitor monk shall die ere I retreat,' cried Hereward, seizing him by the throat.

'For heaven's sake, hold!' cried Torfrida, seizing his arm. 'You know not what he may have to say.'

'I am no traitor, Hereward; I have fought by your side as well as the best; and if any but you had called Alwyn——'

'A curse on your boasting. Tell us the truth.'

'The abbot has made peace with the king. He would give up the island, and St. Etheldreda should keep all her lands and honours. I said what I could: but who was I to resist the whole chapter? Could I alone brave St. Etheldreda's wrath?'

'Alwyn, the valiant, afraid of a dead girl!'

'Blaspheme not, Hereward! She may hear you at this moment! Look there!' and pointing up, the monk cowered in terror, as a meteor flashed through the sky.

'That is St. Etheldreda shooting at us, eh? Then all I can say is, she is a very bad marksman. And the French are in the island?'

'They are.'

'Then forward, men, for one half-hour's pleasure; and then to die like Englishmen.'

'On?' cried Alwyn. 'You cannot go on. The king is at Whichford at this moment with all his army, half a mile off! Right across the road to Ely!'

Hereward grew Berserk. 'On! men!' shouted he, 'we shall kill a few Frenchmen apiece before we die!'

'Hereward,' cried Torfrida, 'you shall not go on! If you go, I shall be taken. And if I am taken, I shall be burned. And I cannot burn—I cannot! I shall go mad with terror before I come to the stake. I cannot go stript to my smock before those Frenchmen. I cannot be roasted piecemeal! Hereward, take me away! Take me away! or kill me, now and here!'

He paused. He had never seen Torfrida thus overcome.

'Let us flee! The stars are against us. God is against

us! Let us hide—escape abroad: beg our bread, go on pilgrimage to Jerusalem together—for together it must be always: but take me away!’

‘We will go back to the boats, men,’ said Hereward.

But they did not go. They stood there, irresolute, looking towards Ely.

The sky was pitchy dark. The minster-roofs, lying north-east, were utterly invisible against the blackness.

‘We may at least save some who escape out,’ said Hereward. ‘March on quickly to the left, under the hill to the plough-field.’

They did so.

‘Lie down, men. There are the French, close on our right. Down among the bushes.’

And they heard the heavy tramp of men within a quarter of a mile.

‘Cover the mare’s eyes, and hold her mouth lest she neigh,’ said Winter.

A low murmur from the men made them look up. They were near enough to the town to hear—only too much. They heard the tramp of men, shouts and yells. Then the shrill cries of women. All dull and muffled the sounds came to them through the still night; and they lay there spell-bound, as in a nightmare, as men assisting at some horrible tragedy, which they had no power to prevent. Then there was a glare, and a wisp of smoke against the black sky, and then a house began burning brightly, and then another.

‘This is the Frenchman’s faith!’

And all the while, as the sack raged in the town below, the minster stood above, glaring in the firelight, silent and safe. The church had provided for herself by sacrificing the children beneath her fostering shadow.

They waited nearly an hour, but no fugitives came out.

‘Come, men,’ said Hereward wearily, ‘we may as well to the boats’

And so they went, walking on like men in a dream, as yet too stunned to realise to themselves the hopeless



horror of their situation. Only Hereward and Torfrida saw it all, looking back on the splendid past—the splendid hopes for the future: glory, honour, an earldom, a free Danish England—and this was all that was left!

They reached the shore, and told their tale to their comrades. 'Whither now?'

'To Well. To the wide mere,' said Hereward.

'But their ships will hunt us out there.'

'We shall need no hunting. We must pick up the men at Cissam. You would not leave them to be murdered, too, as we have left the Ely men?'

No. They would go to Well. And then?

'The Brunswald, and the merry greenwood,' said Hereward.

'Hey for the merry greenwood!' shouted Leofric the deacon. And the men, in the sudden delight of finding any place, any purpose, answered with a lusty cheer.

'Brave hearts!' said Hereward. 'We will live and die together like Englishmen.'

'We will, we will, Viking.'

'Where shall we stow the mare?' they asked, 'the boats are full already.'

'Leave her to me. On board, Torfrida.'

He got on board last, leading the mare by the bridle.

'Swim, good lass!' said he, as they pushed off; and the good lass, who had done it many a time before, waded in, and was soon swimming behind. Hereward turned, and bent over the side in the darkness. There was a strange gurgle, a splash, and a swirl. He turned round, and sat upright again. They rowed on.

'That mare will never swim all the way to Well,' said one.

'She will not need it,' said Hereward.

'Why?' said Torfrida, feeling in the darkness, 'she is loose. What is this in your hand? Your dagger? and wet?'

'Mare Swallow is at the bottom of the reach. We could never have got her to Well.'

'And you have——' cried a dozen voices



'Swim, good lass, I' said he, as they pushed off — Page 214

‘Do you think that I would let a cursed Frenchman—ay, even William’s self—say that he had bestridden Hereward’s mare?’

None answered: but Torfrida, as she laid her head upon her husband’s bosom, felt the great tears running down from his cheek on to her own.

None spoke a word. The men were awe-stricken. There was something despairing and ill-omened in the deed. And yet there was a savage grandeur in it, which bound their savage hearts still closer to their chief.

And so mare Swallow’s bones lie somewhere in the peat unto this day.

*Blasphemy.* To speak wickedly of holy things.

*Piecemeal.* In or by parts.

*Wisp.* A thin column.

*Leofric the deacon.* This man was famous for his skill in singing and making verses; and afterwards composed a life of Hereward.

*Swirl.* To whirl in an eddy.

## CHAPTER LI

### HOW HEREWARD WENT TO THE GREENWOOD

AND now is Hereward to the greenwood gone, to be a bold outlaw; and not only an outlaw himself, but the father of all outlaws, who held those forests for two hundred years, from the fens to the Scottish border. They prided themselves upon sleeping on the bare ground; they were accursed by the conquerors, and beloved by the conquered. The Norman viscount or sheriff commanded to hunt them from hundred to hundred with hue and cry, horse and bloodhound. The English yeoman left for them a keg of ale, or a basket of loaves, beneath the hollins green.

With the same friendly yeoman they would lodge by twos and threes during the sharp frosts of mid-winter, in the lonely farmhouse which stood in the ‘field’ or forest-clearing: but for the greater part of the year their

'lodging was on the cold ground' in the holly thickets, or under the hanging rock, or in a lodge of boughs

And then, after a while, the life which had begun in terror, and despair, and poverty, and loss of land and kin, became not only tolerable, but pleasant.

Then called they themselves 'merry men', and the forest the 'merry greenwood.'

They were coaxed back, at times, to civilised life; they got their grace of the king, and entered the king's service; but the craving after the greenwood was upon them. They dreaded and hated the four stone walls of a Norman castle; and, like Robin Hood, slipt back to the forest and the deer

Gradually, too, law and order arose among them, lawless as they were; that instinct of discipline and self-government, side by side with that of personal independence, which is the peculiar mark, and peculiar strength, of the English character.

Hard knocks in good humour, strict rules, fair play, and equal justice for high and low; this was the old outlaw spirit, which has descended to their inlawed descendants; and makes, to this day, the life and marrow of an English public school.

And even so it was with The Wake when he was in the Brunswald, if the old chroniclers are to be believed.

And now Torfrida was astonished. She had given way utterly at Ely, from woman's fear and woman's disappointment. All was over. All was lost. What was left, save to die?

But—and it was a new and unexpected fact to one of her excitable southern blood, easily raised, and easily depressed—she discovered that neither her husband nor any of them thought that all was lost. She argued it with them, not to persuade them into base submission, but to satisfy her own surprise.

'But what will you do?'

'Live in the greenwood.'

'And what then?'

‘Burn every town which a Frenchman holds, and kill every Frenchman we meet.’

‘But what plan have you?’

‘Who wants a plan, as you call it, while he has the green hollies overhead, the dun deer on the lawn, bow in his hand, and sword by his side?’

‘But what will be the end of it all?’

‘We shall live till we die.’

‘But William is master of all England.’

‘What is that to us? He is not our master.’

‘But he must be some day. You will grow fewer and fewer. His government will grow stronger and stronger.’

‘What is that to us? When we are dead, there will be brave yeomen in plenty to take our place. You would not turn traitor?’

‘I? never! never! I will live and die with you in your greenwood, as you call it. Only—I did not understand you English.’

Torfrida did not. She was discovering the fact, which her nation have more than once discovered since, that the stupid valour of the Englishman never knows when it is beaten; and sometimes, by that self-satisfied ignorance, succeeds in not being beaten after all.

So The Wake assembled a formidable force, well-nigh, at last, four hundred men; and they ranged up the Brunswald, dashing out to the war-cry of ‘A Wake! A Wake!’ and laying all waste with fire and sword; that is, such towns as were in the hands of Frenchmen.

And it befell, that once upon a day, there came riding to Hereward in the Brunswald, a horseman all alone.

And meeting with Hereward and his men, he made signs of amity, and bowed himself low, and pulled out of his purse a letter, protesting that he was an Englishman, and that though he came from Lincoln town, a friend to the English had sent him.

That was believable enough, for Hereward had his friends, and his spies, far and wide.

And when he opened the letter, and looked first, like a wary man, at the signature—a sudden thrill went through him

It was Alfruda's.

If he was interested in her, considering what had passed between them from her childhood, it was nothing to be ashamed of. And yet, somehow, he felt ashamed of that same sudden thrill.

And Hereward had reason to be ashamed. He had been faithful to Torfrida, and loved her with an overwhelming adoration—as all true men love. And for that very reason he was the more aware, that his feeling for Alfruda was strangely like his feeling for Torfrida; and yet strangely different.

There was nothing in the letter that he should not have read. She called him her best and dearest friend, twice the saviour of her life. What could she do in return, but, at any risk to herself, try and save his life? The French were upon him. The sheriff's array of seven counties was raising. 'Northampton, Cambridge, Lincoln, Holland, Leicester, Huntingdon, Warwick,' were coming to the Brunswald to root him out.

Hereward set to work, joyfully, cheerfully, scenting battle afar off, like Job's war-horse, and pawing for the battle. He sent back Alfruda's messenger, with this answer:—

'Tell your lady that I kiss her hands and feet. That I cannot write, for outlaws carry no pen and ink. But that what she has commanded, that will I perform.'

It is noteworthy, that when Hereward showed Torfrida (which he did frankly) Alfruda's letter, he did not tell her the exact words of his answer, and stumbled and varied much, vexing her thereby, when she, naturally, wished to hear them word for word.

Then he sent out spies to the four quarters of heaven. And his spies, finding a friend and a meal in every hovel, brought home all the news he needed.

He withdrew Torfrida and his men into the heart of the

forest, cut down trees, formed a stockade of trunks and branches, and awaited the enemy.

*Hundred.* A division of a county.

*Inlawed.* Law-abiding citizens. The opposite of outlawed.

*Amity.* Friendship.

*The four quarters of heaven.* In every direction

*Stockade.* A strong fence made of stakes.

## CHAPTER LII

### HOW HEReward LIVED IN THE GREENWOOD

THE weary months ran on, from summer into winter, and winter into summer again, for two years and more, and neither Torfrida nor Hereward was the better for them. Hope deferred maketh the heart sick; and a sick heart is but too apt to be a peevish one. So there were fits of despondency, jars, mutual recriminations. 'If I had not taken your advice, I should not have been here.' 'If I had not loved you so well, I might have been very differently off.' And so forth. The words were wiped away the next hour, perhaps the next minute, by sacred kisses: but they had been said, and would be recollected, and perhaps said again.

Then, again, the 'merry greenwood' was merry enough in the summer tide, but it was a sad place enough, when the autumn fog crawled round the gorse, and dripped off the holhes, and choked alike the breath and the eyesight; when the air sickened with the graveyard smell of rotting leaves, and the rain-water stood in the clay holes over the poached and sloppy lawns.

It was merry enough, too, when they were in winter quarters in friendly farmhouses, as long as the bright sharp frosts lasted, and they tracked the hares and deer merrily over the frozen snows: but it was doleful enough in those same farmhouses in the howling wet weather,

when wind and rain lashed in through the unglazed window and ill-made roof, and there were coughs and colds and rheumatisms, and Torfrida ached from head to foot, and once could not stand upright for a whole month together, and every cranny was stuffed up with bits of board and rags, keeping out light and air as well as wind and water; and there was little difference between the short day and the long night; and the men gambled and wrangled amid clouds of peat reek, over draught-boards and chessmen which they had carved for themselves, and Torfrida sat stitching and sewing, making and mending, her eyes bleared with peat smoke, her hands sore and coarse from continued labour, her cheek bronzed, her face thin and hollow, and all her beauty worn away for very trouble. Then sometimes there was not enough to eat, and every one grumbled at her; or some one's clothes were not mended, and she was grumbled at again. And sometimes a foraging party brought home liquor, and all who could got drunk to drive dull care away, and Hereward, forgetful of all her warnings, got more than was good for him likewise; and at night she coiled herself up in her furs, cold and contemptuous; and Hereward coiled himself up, guilty and defiant, and woke her again and again with startings and wild words in his sleep. And she felt that her beauty was gone, and that he saw it; and she fancied him (perhaps it was only fancy) less tender than of yore; and then in very pride disdained to take any care of her person, and said to herself, though she dare not say it to him, that if he only loved her for her face, he did not love her at all. And because she fancied him cold at times, she was cold likewise, and grew less and less caressing, when for his sake, as well as her own, she should have grown more so day by day.

But in justice to them be it said, that neither of them had complained of the other to any living soul. Their love had been as yet too perfect, too sacred, for them to confess to another (and thereby confess to themselves) that it could in any wise fail. They had each idolised the



other, and been too proud of their idolatry to allow that their idol could crumble or decay.

And yet at last that point too was reached. One day they were wrangling about somewhat, as they too often wrangled, and Hereward in his temper let fall the words, 'As I said to Winter the other day, you grow harder and harder upon me.'

Torfrida started and fixed on him wide, terrible, scornful eyes. 'So you complain of me to your boon companions?'

And she turned and went away without a word. A gulf had opened between them. They hardly spoke to each other for a week.

Hereward complained of Torfrida? What if Torfrida should complain of Hereward? But to whom? Not to the coarse women round her! her pride revolted from that thought:—and yet she longed for counsel, for sympathy—to open her heart but to one fellow-woman. She would go to the Lady Godiva at Crowland, and take counsel of her, whether there was any method (for she put it to herself) of saving Hereward; for she saw but too clearly that he was fast forgetting all her teaching, and falling back to a point lower than that even from which she had raised him up

To go to Crowland was not difficult. It was mid-winter. The dykes were all frozen. Hereward was out foraging in the Lincolnshire wolds. So Torfrida, taking advantage of his absence, proposed another foraging party to Crowland itself. She wanted stuff for clothes, needles, thread, what not. A dozen stout fellows volunteered at once to take her. The friendly monks of Crowland would feast them royally, and send them home heaped with all manner of good things; while as for meeting Ivo Taillebois' men, if they had but three to one against them, there was a fair chance of killing a few, and carrying off their clothes and weapons, which would be useful. So they made a sledge, tied beef bones underneath it, put Torfrida and the girl thereon, well wrapped in deer and fox and badger skin, and then putting on their skates, swept

them over the fen to Crowland, singing like larks along the dykes.

And Torfrida went in to Godiva, and wept upon her knees; and Godiva wept likewise, and gave her such counsel as she could—how if the woman will keep the man heroic, she must keep herself not heroic only but devout likewise.

And Torfrida said yes, and yes, and yes, and felt in her heart that she knew all that already. Had not she too taught, entreated, softened, civilised? Had not she too spent her life upon a man, and that man a wolf's head and a landless outlaw, more utterly than Godiva could ever have spent hers on one who lived lapped in luxury, and wealth, and power? Torfrida had done her best, and she had failed: or at least fancied in her haste that she had failed.

What she wanted was not counsel, but love. And she clung round the Lady Godiva, till the broken and ruined widow opened all her heart to her, and took her in her arms, and fondled her as if she had been a babe. And the two women spoke few words after that, for indeed there was nothing to be said. Only at last, 'My child, my child,' cried Godiva, 'better for thee, body and soul, to be here with me in the house of God, than there amid evil spirits and deeds of darkness in the wild woods.'

'Not a cloister, not a cloister,' cried Torfrida, shuddering, and half struggling to get away.

'It is the only place, poor wilful child, the only place this side the grave, in which we wretched creatures, who to our woe are women born, can find aught of rest or peace. You too will come here, Torfrida, some day, I know it well. You too will come here to rest.'

'Never, never,' shrieked Torfrida, 'never to these horrid vaults. I will die in the fresh air. I will be buried under the green hollies; and the nightingales shall build and sing over my grave. Never, never!' murmured she to herself all the more eagerly,

because something within her said that it would come, to pass.

*Jurs.* Quarrels.

*Recriminatious.* Reproaches

*Poached.* Trodden with deep tracks.

*Reek.* Smoke.

*Beef bones* To act as runners, upon which it could slide.

## CHAPTER LIII

### HOW ALFTRUDA WROTE TO HEReward

It might have been two months afterwards that Martin Lightfoot put a letter into Torfrida's hand.

The letter was addressed to Hereward: but there was nothing strange in Martin's bringing it to his mistress. Ever since their marriage, she had opened and generally answered the very few epistles with which her husband was troubled.

She was going to open this one as a matter of course, when glancing at the superscription she saw, or fancied she saw, that it was in a woman's hand. She looked at it again. It was sealed plainly with a woman's seal, and she looked up at Martin Lightfoot. She had remarked as he gave her the letter a sly significant look in his face.

'What dost thou know of this letter?' she inquired sharply.

'That it is from the Countess Alftruda, whosoever she may be.'

A chill struck through her heart. True, Alftruda had written before, only to warn Hereward of danger to his life—and hers. She might be writing again, only for the same purpose. But still, she did not wish that either Hereward or she should owe Alftruda their lives, or anything. They had struggled on through weal and woe without her for many a year. Let them do so without her still.

'How came this letter into thy hands?' asked she as carelessly as she could.

'I was in Peterborough last night,' said Martin, 'concerning little matters of my own, and there came to me in the street a bonny young page with smart jacket on his back, smart cap on his head, and smiles and bows, and "You are one of Hereward's men," quoth he. "Say that again, young jackanapes," said I, "and I'll cut your tongue out," whereat he took fright and all but cried. He was very sorry, and meant no harm, but he had a letter for my master, and he heard I was one of his men. Then he pulls out this and five silver pennies, and I shall have five more if I bring an answer back: but to none than Hereward must I give it.'

'You have been officious,' said Torfrida coldly. "'Tis addressed to your master. Take it to him. Go.'

Martin Lightfoot whistled and obeyed, while Torfrida walked away proudly and silently with a beating heart.

Again Godiva's words came over her. Should she end in the convent of Crowland? And suspecting, fearing, imagining all sorts of baseless phantoms, she hardened her heart into a great hardness.

Martin had gone with the letter, and Torfrida never heard any more of it.

So Hereward had secrets which he would not tell to her. At last!

That, at least, was a misery which she would not confide to Lady Godiva, or to any soul on earth.

And she wept till she could weep no more.

Then she went back, calm, all but cold: but determined not to betray herself, let him do what he would. Perhaps it was all a mistake, a fancy. At least she would not degrade him, and herself, by showing suspicion. It would be dreadful, shameful to herself, wickedly unjust to him, to accuse him were he innocent after all.

Hereward, she remarked, was more kind to her now. But it was a kindness which she did not like. It was shy,

faltering, as of a man guilty and ashamed ; and she repelled it as much as she dared, and then, once or twice, returned it passionately, madly, in hopes——

But he never spoke a word of that letter.

After a dreadful month, Martin came mysteriously to her again. She trembled, for she had remarked in him lately a strange change. He had lost his usual loquacity and quaint humour ; and had fallen back into that sullen taciturnity which, so she heard, he had kept up in his youth. He, too, must know evil which he dared not tell.

‘There is another letter come. It came last night,’ said he.

‘What is that to thee or me ? My lord has his state secrets. Is it for us to pry into them ? Go’

‘I thought—I thought——’

‘Go, I say’

‘That your ladyship might wish for a guide to Crowland.’

‘Crowland’ almost shrieked Torfrida, for the thought of Crowland had risen in her own wretched mind instantly and involuntarily. ‘Go, madman !’

Martin went. Torfrida paced madly up and down the farmhouse. Then she settled herself into fierce despair.

There was a noise of trampling horses outside. The men were arming and saddling, seemingly for a raid

Hereward hurried in for his armour. When he saw Torfrida, he blushed scarlet.

‘You want your arms,’ said she quietly, ‘let me fetch them.’

‘No, never mind. I can harness myself ; I am going south-west, to pay Taillebois a visit. I am in a great hurry. I shall be back in three days Then—good-bye.’

He snatched his arms off a perch, and hurried out again, dragging them on. As he passed her, he offered to kiss her ; she put him back, and helped him on with his armour, while he thanked her confusedly

‘He was as glad not to kiss me, after all!’

She looked after him as he stood, his hand on his horse’s withers. How noble he looked! And a great yearning came over her. To throw her arms round his neck once, and then to stab herself, and set him free, dying, as she had lived, for him.

Two bonny boys were wrestling on the lawn, young outlaws who had grown up in the forest with ruddy cheeks and iron limbs.

‘Ah, Winter!’—she heard him say, ‘had I had such a boy as that!—’

She heard no more. She turned away, her heart dead within her. She knew all that those words implied, in days when the possession of land was everything to the free man; and the possession of a son necessary, to pass that land on in the ancestral line. And now, the little Torfrida, named after herself, was all that she had brought to Hereward, and he was the last of his house. She saw it all now, and her heart was dead within her.

She spent that evening, neither eating nor drinking, but sitting over the log embers, her head upon her hands, and thinking over all her past life and love, since she saw him, from the gable window, ride the first time into St. Omer. She went through it all, with a certain stern delight in the self-torture, deliberately day by day, year by year,—all its lofty aspirations, all its blissful passages, all its deep disappointments, and found in it—so she chose to fancy in the wilfulness of her misery, nothing but cause for remorse. Self in all, vanity, and vexation of spirit; for herself she had loved him, for herself she had tried to raise him; for herself she had set her heart on man, and not on God. She had sown the wind: and behold she had reaped the whirlwind. She could not repent, she could not pray. But oh! that she could die.

She was unjust to herself in her great nobleness. It was not true, not half, not a tenth part true. But perhaps it was good for her that it should seem true for that

moment ; that she should be emptied of all earthly things for once, if so she might be filled from above.

*Superscription.* The outside writing ; the address.

*Jackanapes.* A coxcomb.

*Officious.* Taking too much upon himself.

*Loquacity.* Continual talking.

*Taciturnity* Habitual silence.

*Withers.* Shoulders.

## CHAPTER LIV

### HOW TORFRIDA WENT TO CROWLAND

At last she went into the inner room to lie down and try to sleep. At her feet, under the perch where Hereward's armour had hung, lay an open letter.

She picked it up, surprised at seeing such a thing there, and kneeling down, held it eagerly to the wax candle which was on a spike at the bed's head.

She knew the handwriting in a moment. It was Alfruda's.

It congratulated Hereward on having shaken himself free from the fascinations of that sorceress. It said that all was settled with King William. Hereward was to come to Winchester. She had the king's writ for his safety ready to send to him. The king would receive him as his liegeman. Alfruda would receive him as her husband. Archbishop Lanfranc had made difficulties about the dissolution of the marriage with Torfrida : but gold would do all things at Rome ; and Lanfranc was her very good friend, and a reasonable man—and so forth.

Men, and beasts likewise, when stricken with a mortal wound, will run, and run on, blindly, aimless, impelled by the mere instinct of escape from intolerable agony. And so did Torfrida. Half undrest as she was, she fled forth into the forest, she knew not whither, running as one does wrapt in fire : but the fire was not without her, but within.

She cast a passing glance at the girl who lay by her, sleeping a pure and gentle sleep——

‘Oh, that thou hadst but been a boy!’ Then she thought no more of her, not even of Hereward: but all of which she was conscious was a breast and brain bursting; an intolerable choking, from which she must escape.

She ran, and ran on, for miles. She knew not whether the night was light or dark, warm or cold. Her tender feet might have been ankle deep in snow. The branches over her head might have been howling in the tempest, or dripping with rain. She knew not, and heeded not. The owls hooted to each other under the staring moon, but she heard them not. The wolves glared at her from the brakes, and slunk off appalled at the white ghostly figure. but she saw them not. The deer stood at gaze in the glades till she was close upon them, and then bounded into the wood. She ran right at them, past them, heedless. She had but one thought. To flee from the agony of a soul alone in the universe with its own misery.

At last she was aware of a man close beside her. He had been following her a long way, she recollected now: but she had not feared him, even heeded him. But when he laid his hand upon her arm she turned fiercely: but without dread.

She looked to see if it was Hereward. To meet him would be death. If it were not he, she cared not who it was. It was not Hereward; and she cried angrily, ‘Off! Off!’ and hurried on.

‘But you are going the wrong way! The wrong way!’ said the voice of Martin Lightfoot.

‘The wrong way! Fool, which is the right way for me, save the path which leads to a land where all is forgotten?’

‘To Crowland! To Crowland! To the minster! To the monks! That is the only right way for poor wretches in a world like this. The Lady Godiva told you you must go to Crowland. And now you are going. I too, I ran



away from a monastery when I was young, and now I am going back. Come along!’

‘You are right! Crowland, Crowland; and a nun’s cell till death. Which is the way, Martin?’

‘Oh, a wise lady! A reasonable lady! But you will be cold before you get thither. There will be a frost ere morn. So when I saw you run out, I caught up something to put over you.’

Torfrida shuddered, as Martin wrapt her in the white bear’s skin.

Martin caught her up in his arms, threw her over his shoulder as if she had been a child, and hurried on, in the strength of madness.

At last he stopped at a cottage door, set her down upon the turf, and knocked loudly.

‘Give me a horse, on your life,’ said he to the man inside. ‘I am Martin, The Wake’s man, upon my master’s business.’

‘What is mine is The Wake’s, God bless him,’ said the man, struggling into a garment, and hurrying out to the shed.

‘There is a ghost against the gate!’ cried he recoiling

‘That is my matter, not yours. Get me a horse to put the ghost upon’

Torfrida lay against the gate-post, exhausted now but quite unable to think. Martin lifted her on to the beast, and led her onward, holding her up again and again.

‘You are tired. You had run four miles before I could make you hear me.’

‘Would I had run four thousand!’ And she relapsed into stupor.

They passed out of the forest, across open wolds, and at last down to the river. Martin knew of a boat there. He lifted her from the horse, turned him loose, put Torfrida into the boat, and took the oars.

She looked up, and saw the roofs of Bourne shining white in the moonlight.

And then she lifted up her voice, and shrieked three times, 'Lost! Lost! Lost!' with such a dreadful cry, that the starlings whirled up from the reeds, and the wild fowl rose clanging off the meres, and the watch-dogs in Bourne barked and howled, and folk told fearfully next morning, how a white ghost had gone down from the forest to the fen, and wakened them with its unearthly scream.

The sun was high when they came to Crowland minster. Torfrida had neither spoken nor stirred; and Martin, who in the midst of his madness kept a strange courtesy and delicacy, had never disturbed her, save to wrap the bear's skin more closely over her.

When they came to the bank, she rose, stepped out without his help, and drawing the bear's skin closely round her, and over her head, walked straight up to the gate of the house of nuns.

The portress looked through the wicket.

'I am Torfrida,' said a voice of terrible calm. 'I am come to see the Lady Godiva. Let me in.'

The portress opened, utterly astounded.

'Madam!' said Martin eagerly, as Torfrida entered.

'What? What?' she seemed to waken from a dream. 'God bless thee, thou good and faithful servant'; and she turned again.

'Madam! Say!'

'What?'

'Shall I go back, and kill him?' And he held out the little axe.

Torfrida snatched it from his grasp with a shriek, and cast it inside the convent door.

'Mother Mary and all saints!' cried the portress, 'your garments are in rags, madam!'

'Never mind. Bring me garments of yours. I shall need none other till I die!' and she walked in and on.

'She is come to be a nun!' whispered the portress to the next sister, and she again to the next

Torfrida went straight on, speaking to no one, not even to the prioress; and into Lady Godiva's chamber.

There she dropped at the countess' feet, and laid her head upon her knees.

'I am come, as you always told me I should do. But it has been a long way hither, and I am very tired.'

'My child! What is this? What brings you here?'

'I am doing penance for my sins'

'And your feet all cut and bleeding.'

'Are they?' said Torfrida vacantly. 'I will tell you all about it when I wake.'

And she fell fast asleep, with her head in Godiva's lap

*Liegeman.* A faithful subject.

*Brakes.* Thickets of shrubs.

*Relapsed.* Fell back into.

## CHAPTER LV

### HOW HEReward CAME BACK FROM WINCHESTER

THE countess did not speak or stir. She beckoned the good prioress, who had followed Torfrida in, to go away. She saw that something dreadful had happened; and prayed as she awaited the news.

Torfrida slept for a full hour. Then she awoke with a start.

'Where am I? Hereward!'

Then followed a dreadful shriek, which made every nun in that quiet house shudder.

'I recollect all now,' said Torfrida. 'Listen!' And she told the countess all, with speech so calm and clear that Godiva was awed by the power and spirit of that marvellous woman.

But she groaned in bitterness of soul. 'Anything but this. Rather death from him than treachery. This last, worst woe had God kept in His quiver for me most miserable of women. And now his bolt has fallen!

Hereward! Hereward! That thy mother should wish her last child laid in his grave!’

‘Not so,’ said Torfrida, ‘it is well as it is. How better? It is his only chance for comfort, for honour, for life itself. He would have grown a——I was growing bad and foul myself in that ugly wilderness. Now he will be a knight once more among knights, and win himself fresh honour in fresh fields. Let him marry her. Why not? He can get a dispensation from the pope, and then there will be no sin in it, you know. If the Holy Father cannot make wrong right, who can? Yes. It is very well as it is. And I am very well where I am. Women! Bring me scissors, and one of your nun’s dresses. I am come to be a nun like you.’

Godiva would have stopped her. But Torfrida rose upon her knees, and calmly made a solemn vow, which though canonically void without her husband’s consent, would, she well knew, never be disputed by any there: and as for him,—‘He has lost me, and for ever. Torfrida never gives herself away twice’

‘There’s carnal pride in those words, my poor child,’ said Godiva.

‘Cruel!’ said she proudly. ‘When I am sacrificing myself utterly for him.’

‘And thy poor girl?’

‘He will let her come hither,’ said Torfrida, with forced calm. ‘He will see that it is not fit that she should grow up with—yes, he will send her to me—to us. And I shall live for her—and for you. If you will let me be your bower-woman, dress you, serve you, read to you. You know that I am a pretty scholar. You will let me, mother? I may call you mother, may I not?’ And Torfrida fondled the old woman’s thin hands. ‘For I do want so much something to love.’

And Torfrida cut off her raven locks, now streaked with gray; and put on the nun’s dress, and became a nun henceforth.

On the second day there came to Crowland Leofric the priest, and with him the poor child.

She had woke in the morning and found no mother. Leofric and the other men searched the woods round, far and wide. The girl mounted her horse, and would go with them. Then they took a bloodhound, and he led them to the woodman's hut. There they heard of Martin. The ghost must have been Torfrida. Then the hound brought them to the river. And they divined at once that she was gone to Crowland, to Godiva. but why, they could not guess.

Then the girl insisted, prayed, at last commanded them to take her to Crowland. And to Crowland they came.

Leofric left the girl at the nuns' house door, and went into the monastery, where he had friends enow, runaway and renegade as he was. As he came into the great court, whom should he meet but Martin Lightfoot, in a lay brother's frock.

'Aha! And are you come home likewise? Have you renounced the devil and this last work of his?'

'What work? What devil?' asked Leofric, who saw method in Martin's madness. 'And what do you here in a long frock?'

'Devil? Hereward the devil. I would have killed him with my axe: but she got it from me, and threw it in among the holy sisters, and I had work to get it again. Shame on her, to spoil my chance of heaven. For I should surely have won heaven, you know, if I had killed the devil.'

After much beating about, Leofric got from Martin the whole tragedy.

And when he heard it, he burst out weeping.

And Leofric, in the midst of Crowland Yard, tore off his belt and trusty sword, his hauberk and helm also, and letting down his monk's frock, which he wore trussed to the mid-knee, he went to the abbot's lodgings, and asked to see old Ulfketyl.

'Bring him up,' said the good abbot, 'for he is a

valiant man and true, in spite of all his vanities ; and may be, he brings news of Hereward, whom God forgive.'

And when Leofric came in, he fell upon his knees, bewailing and confessing his sinful life ; and begged the abbot to take him back again into Crowland minster, and lay upon him what penance he thought fit, and put him in the lowest office because he was a man of blood ; if only he might stay there, and have a sight at times of his dear Lady Torfrida, without whom he should surely die.

So Leofric was received back, in full chapter, by abbot, and prior, and all the monks. But when he asked them to lay a penance upon him, Ulfketyl arose from his high chair, and spoke.

'Shall we, who have sat here at ease, lay a penance on this man, who has shed his blood in fifty valiant fights for us, and for St. Guthlac, and for this English land ? Look at yon scars upon his head and arms. He has had sharper discipline from cold steel than we could give him here with rod ; and has fasted in the wilderness more sorely, many a time, than we have fasted here'

And all the monks agreed that no penance should be laid on Leofric.

Hereward came back on the third day, and found his wife and daughter gone. His guilty conscience told him in the first instance why. For he went into the chamber, and there, upon the floor, lay the letter which he had looked for in vain.

None had touched it where it lay. Perhaps no one had dared to enter the chamber. If they had, they would not have dared to meddle with writing which they could not read, and which might contain some magic spell. Letters were very safe in those old days.

He raged and blustered. He must hide his shame. He must justify himself to his knights ; and much more to himself : or if not justify himself, must shift some of the blame over to the opposite side. So he raged and blustered. He had been robbed of his wife and daughter. They had been cajoled away by the monks of Crowland.

What villains were those to rob an honest man of his family while he was fighting for his country?

So he rode down to the river, and there took two great barges, and rowed away to Crowland, with forty men-at-arms.

And all the while he thought of Alfruda, as he had seen her at Peterborough.

And of no one else?

Not so. For all the while he felt that he loved Torfrida's little finger better than Alfruda's whole body, and soul into the bargain.

*Canonically void.* Of no account in the eyes of the church.

*Carnal.* Fleshly.

*Trussed.* Tied up.

*Chapter.* The assembly of the chief clergy belonging to a cathedral or monastery.

*Cajoled.* Persuaded; enticed.

## CHAPTER LVI

### HOW HERWARD WENT TO CROWLAND

WHAT a long way it was to Crowland. How wearying were the hours through mere and ea. How wearying the monotonous pulse of the oars.

Sometimes he hoped that Torfrida might hold her purpose, and set him free to follow his wicked will. All the lower nature in him, so long crushed under, leapt up chuckling and grinning and tumbling head over heels, and cried—Now I shall have a holiday!

Sometimes he hoped that Torfrida might come out to the shore, and settle the matter in one moment, by a glance of her great hawk's eyes. If she would but quell him by one look; leap on board, seize the helm, and assume without a word the command of his men and him; steer them back to Bourne, and sit down beside him with a kiss, as if nothing had happened. If she would but do that,

and ignore the past, would he not ignore it? Would he not forget Alfruda, and King William, and all the world, and go up with her into Sherwood, and then north to Scotland, and be a man once more?

No. He did not deserve such luck; and he would not get it

She would talk it all out. She must, for she was a woman. She would blame, argue, say dreadful words—dreadful, because true and deserved. Then she would grow angry, as women do when they are most in the right, and say too much—still more dreadful words, which would be untrue and undeserved. Then he should resist, recriminate. He would not stand it. He could not stand it. No. He could never face her again.

And yet if he had seen a man insult her—if he had seen her at that moment in peril of the slightest danger, the slightest bruise, he would have rushed forward like a madman, and died, saving her from that bruise. And he knew that: and with the strange self-contradiction of human nature, he soothed his own conscience by the thought that he loved her still; and that, therefore—somehow or other, he cared not to make out how—he had done her no wrong. Then he blustered again, for the benefit of his men. He would teach these monks of Crowland a lesson. He would burn the minster over their heads

‘That would be pity, seeing they are the only Englishmen left in England,’ said Siward the White, his nephew, very simply.

‘What is that to thee? Thou hast helped to burn Peterborough at my bidding; and thou shalt help to burn Crowland.’

‘I am a free gentleman of England, and what I choose, I do. I shall not burn Crowland, or let any man burn it.

‘Shall not let?’

‘No,’ said the young man, so quietly that Hereward was cowed.

‘I—I only meant—if they did not do right by me’



‘Do right thyself,’ said Siward.

Hereward swore awfully, and laid his hand on his sword-hilt. But he did not draw it; for he thought he saw overhead a cloud which was very like the figure of St Guthlac in Crowland window, and an awe fell upon him from above.

So they came to Crowland; and Hereward landed and beat upon the gates, and spoke high words. But the monks did not open the gates for a while. At last the gates creaked, and opened, and in the gateway stood Abbot Ulfketyl in his robes of state, and behind him the prior, and all the officers, and all the monks of the house.

‘Comes Hereward in peace or in war?’

‘In war!’ said Hereward.

Then that true and trusty old man, who sealed his patriotism, if not with his blood—for the very Normans had not the heart to take that—still with long and bitter sorrows, lifted up his head, and said, like a valiant Dane, as his name bespoke him, ‘Against the traitor and the adulterer——’

‘I am neither,’ roared Hereward.

‘Thou wouldst be, if thou couldst Whoso looketh upon a woman to——’

‘Preach me no sermons, man! Let me in to seek my wife.’

‘Over my body,’ said Ulfketyl, and laid himself down across the threshold.

Hereward recoiled. If he had dared to step over that sacred body, there was not a blood-stained ruffian in his crew who dared to follow him.

‘Rise, rise! for God’s sake, lord abbot,’ said he. ‘Whatever I am, I need not that you should disgrace me thus. Only let me see her—reason with her.’

‘She has vowed herself to God, and is none of thine henceforth.’

‘It is against the canons. A wrong and a robbery.’  
Ulfketyl rose, grand as ever.

‘Hereward Leofricsson, our joy and our glory once. Hearken to the old man who will soon go whither thine uncle Brand is gone, and be free of Frenchmen, and of all this wicked world. When the walls of Crowland dare not shelter the wronged woman, fleeing from man’s treason to God’s faithfulness, then let the roofs of Crowland burn till the flame reaches heaven, for a sign that the children of God are as false as the children of this world, and break their faith like any belted knight.’

Hereward was silenced. His men shrunk back from him. He felt as if God, and the mother of God, and St. Guthlac, and all the host of heaven, were shrinking back from him likewise. He turned to supplications, compromises—what else was left.

‘At least you will let me have speech of her, or of my mother?’

‘They must answer that, not I.’

Hereward sent in, entreating to see one, or both.

‘Tell him,’ said Lady Godiva, ‘who calls himself my son, that my sons were men of honour, and that he must have been changed at nurse.’

‘Tell him,’ said Torfrida, ‘that I have lived my life, and am dead. Dead. If he would see me, he will only see my corpse.’

‘You would not slay yourself?’

‘What is there that I dare not do? You do not know Torfrida. He does.’

And Hereward did, and went back again like a man stunned.

After a while there came by boat to Crowland all Torfrida’s wealth; clothes, jewels. Not a shred had Hereward kept. The magic armour came with them.

Torfrida gave all to the abbey, there and then. Only the armour she wrapped up in the white bear’s skin, and sent it back to Hereward, with her blessing, and entreaty not to refuse that, her last bequest.

Hereward did not refuse, for very shame. But for very shame he never wore that armour more. For very

hame he never slept again upon the white bear's skin, on which he and his true love had lain so many a year.

*Cowed.* Frightened, abashed

*Canons.* The rules of the church

*Supplications.* Prayers; entreaties

*Compromises.* Mutual agreements.

## CHAPTER LVII

### HOW HEReward CAME IN TO THE KING

AFTER these things Hereward summoned all his men, and set before them the hopelessness of any further resistance, and the promises of amnesty, lands, and honours which William had offered him; and persuaded them—and indeed he had good arguments enough and to spare—that they should go and make their peace with the king.

They were so accustomed to look up to his determination, that when it gave way theirs gave way likewise. They were so accustomed to trust his wisdom, that most of them yielded at once to his arguments.

That the band should break up, all agreed. A few of the more suspicious, or more desperate, said that they could never trust the Frenchman, that Hereward himself had warned them again and again of his treachery.

But Hereward was deaf to their arguments. He had said as little to them as he could about Alfruda, for very shame: but he was utterly besotted on her. For her sake, he had determined to run his head blindly into the very snare of which he had warned others. And he had seared—so he fancied—his conscience. It was Torfrida's fault now, not his. If she left him—if she herself freed him of her own will—why, he was free, and there was no more to be said about it.

Be that as it may, Hereward rode south. But when he had gotten a long way upon the road, a fancy came over him. He was not going in pomp and glory enough. It

seemed mean for the once great Hereward to sneak into Winchester with three knights. Perhaps it seemed not over safe for the once great Hereward to travel with only three knights. So he went back all the way to camp, and took forty most famous knights, all big and tall of stature, and splendid—if from nothing else, from their looks and their harness alone.

So Hereward and those forty knights rode down from Peterborough, along the Roman road, till they saw far below them the royal city of Winchester.

Itchen, silver as they looked on her from above, but when they came down to her, so clear that none could see where water ended and where air began, hurried through the city in many a stream. Beyond it rose the White Camp, the circular earthwork of white chalk on the high down. Within the city rose the ancient minster church, where slept the ancient kings, but nearer to them, on the down which sloped up to the west, stood an uglier thing, which they saw with curses deep and loud,—the keep of the new Norman castle by the west gate.

Hereward halted his knights upon the down outside the northern gate. Then he rode forward himself. The gate was open wide; but he did not care to go in.

So he rode into the gateway, and smote upon that gate with his lance-butt. But the porter saw the knights upon the down, and was afraid to come out; for he feared treason.

Then Hereward smote a second time but the porter did not come out.

Then he took the lance by the shaft, and smote a third time. And he smote so hard, that the lance-butt flew to flinders against Winchester Gate.

And at that started out two knights, who had come down from the castle, seeing the array upon the down; and asked

‘Who art thou, who knockest here so bold?’

‘Who I am, any man can see by those splinters, if he knows what men are left in England this day.’

The knights looked at the broken wood, and then at

each other. Who could the man be, who could beat an ash stave to flinders at a single blow ?

‘You are young, and do not know me ; and no shame to you. Go and tell William the king that Hereward is come to put his hands between the king’s, and be the king’s man henceforth.’

‘You are Hereward ?’ asked one, half awed, half disbelieving at Hereward’s short stature.

‘You are—I know not who. Pick up those splinters, and take them to King William ; and say, “The man who broke that lance against the gate is here to make his peace with thee,” and he will know who I am.’

And so cowed were these two knights with Hereward’s royal voice, and royal eye, and royal strength, that they went simply, and did what he bade them.

And when King William saw the splinters, he was as joyful as man could be, and said :

‘Send him to me, and tell him, Bright shines the sun to me that lights Hereward into Winchester.’

‘But, lord king, he has with him a company of full forty knights.’

‘So much the better I shall have the more valiant Englishmen to help my valiant French.’

So Hereward rode round, outside the walls, to William’s new entrenched palace outside the west gate, by the castle.

And then Hereward went in, and knelt before the Norman, and put his hands between William’s hands, and swore to be his man.

‘I have kept my word,’ said he, ‘which I sent to thee at Rouen seven years agone. Thou art king of all England, and I am the last man to say so.’

‘And since thou hast said it, I am king indeed. Come with me, and dine ; and to-morrow I will see thy knights.’

And William walked out of the hall leaning on Hereward’s shoulder, at which all the Normans gnashed their teeth with envy.

‘And for my knights, lord king ? Thine and mine will



And then Hereward went in, and knelt before the Norman, and put his hands between William's hands, and swore to be his man — Page 212

mix, for a while yet, like oil and water, and I fear lest there be murder done between them.'

'Likely enough.'

So the knights were bestowed in a camp near by; and the next day the venerable king himself went forth to see those knights, and caused them to stand, and march before him, both with arms and without. With whom being much delighted, he praised them, congratulating them on their beauty and stature, and saying that they must all be knights of fame in war. After which Hereward sent them all home except two; and waited till he should marry Alfruda, and get back his heritage.

'And when that happens,' said William, 'why should we not have two weddings as well as one? I hear that you have in Crowland a fair daughter, and marriageable.'

Hereward bowed.

'And I have found a husband for her suitable to her years, and who may conduce to your peace and serenity.'

Hereward bit his lip. To refuse was impossible in those days. But——

'I trust that your grace has found a knight of higher lineage than him, whom, after so many honours, you honoured with the hand of my niece.'

William laughed. It was not his interest to quarrel with Hereward. 'Aha! Ivo, the woodcutter's son. I ask your pardon for that, Sir Hereward. Had you been my man then, as you are now, it might have been different.'

'If a king ask my pardon, I can only ask his in return.'

'You must be friends with Taillebois. He is a brave knight, and a wise warrior.'

'None ever doubted that.'

'And to cover any little blots in his scutcheon, I have made him an earl, as I may make you some day.'

'Your majesty, like a true king, knows how to reward. Who is this knight whom you have chosen for my lass?'

'Sir Hugh of Evermue, a neighbour of yours, and a man of blood and breeding.'

‘I know him, and his lineage, and it is very well. I humbly thank your majesty.’

‘Can I be the same man?’ said Hereward to himself bitterly.

And he was not the same man. He was besotted on Alfruda, and humbled himself accordingly.

*Amnesty.* A general pardon for offences.

*Besotted.* Infatuated with.

*Itchen.* The river upon which Winchester stands.

*Flinders.* Splinters.

*Conduce.* Lead up to.

*The hand of my niece.* Ivo had married Lucia, the sister of Edwin and Morcar

*Scutcheon.* Coat of arms To cover blots in a scutcheon means to confer honours upon him, to compensate for his being of low birth.

## CHAPTER LVIII

### HOW HEREWARD BEGAN TO GET HIS SOUL’S PRICE

[Hereward married Alfruda; and after much misery at William’s court, broke himself away from the Normans, settling down once more upon his own lands at Bourne. But the Normans, led by Ivo Taillebois, hated him, and plotted to take his life.]

AND now behold Hereward at home again, fat with the wages of sin, and not knowing that they are death.

He had done a bad, base, accursed deed. And he knew it. Once in his life—for his other sins were but the sins of his age—the Father of men seems to have put before this splendid barbarian good and evil, saying, Choose! And he knew that the evil was evil, and chose it nevertheless.

It was not punished by miracle. What sin is? It worked out its own punishment; that which it merited, deserved, or earned, by its own labour. No man could commit such a sin without shaking his whole character to the root. Hereward tried to persuade himself that his was not shaken; that he was the same Hereward as ever. But he could not deceive himself long. His conscience



was evil. He was discontented with all mankind, and with himself most of all. He tried to be good—as good as he chose to be. If he had done wrong in one thing, he might make up for it in others: but he could not. All his higher instincts fell from him one by one. He did not like to think of good and noble things; he dared not think of them. He felt, not at first, but as the months rolled on, that he was a changed man; that God had left him. His old bad habits began to return to him. Gradually he sank back more and more into the very vices from which Torfrida had raised him sixteen years before. He took to drinking again, to dull the malady of thought; he excused himself to himself; he wished to forget his defeats, his disappointment, the ruin of his country, the splendid past which lay behind him like a dream. True: but he wished to forget likewise Torfrida fasting and weeping in Crowland. He could not bear the sight of Crowland tower on the far green horizon, the sound of Crowland bells booming over the flat on the south wind. He never rode down into the fens; he never went to see his daughter at Deeping, because Crowland lay that way. He went up into the old Bruneswald; hunted all day long through the glades where he and his merry men had done their doughty deeds; and came home in the evening to get drunk.

Then he lost his sleep. He sent down to Crowland to Leofric the priest, that he might come to him, and sing him sagas of the old heroes, that he might get rest. But Leofric sent back for answer, that he would not come.

That night Alfruda heard him by her side in the still hours, weeping silently to himself. She caressed him: but he gave no heed to her.

‘I believe,’ said she bitterly at last, ‘that you love Torfrida still better than you do me.’

And Hereward answered, ‘That do I, by heaven. She believed in me when no one else in the world did.’

And the vain hard Alfruda answered angrily; and there was many a fierce quarrel between them after that.

In those days a messenger came riding post to Bourne. The Countess Judith wished to visit Crowland ; and asked hospitality on her road of Hereward and Alfruda.

Of course she would come with a great train, and the trouble and expense would be great. But the hospitality of those days, when money was scarce, and wine scarcer still, was unbounded, and a matter of course ; and Alfruda was overjoyed.

Hereward looked on the visit in a different light. He called Judith ugly names, not undeserved ; and vowed that if she entered his house by the front door he would go out at the back. 'Torfrida prophesied,' he said, 'that she would betray her husband, and she has done it.'

'Torfrida prophesied ? Did she prophesy that I should betray you likewise ?' asked Alfruda, in a tone of bitter scorn.

'No, you handsome fiend. will you do it ?'

'Yes ; I am a handsome fiend, am I not ?' and she bridled up her magnificent beauty, and stood over him as a snake stands over a mouse.

'Yes ; you are handsome—beautiful. I adore you.'

'And yet you will not do what I wish ?'

'What you wish ? What would I not do for you ? what have I not done for you ?'

'Then receive Judith. And now, go hunting, and bring me in game. I want deer, roe, fowls ; anything and everything, from the greatest to the smallest. Go and hunt.'

And Hereward trembled and went with all his men, and sent home large supplies for the larder. And as he hunted, the free fresh air of the forest comforted him, the free forest life came back to him, and he longed to be an outlaw once more, and hunt on for ever. He would not go back yet, at least to face that Judith. So he sent back the greater part of his men with a story. He was ill : he was laid up at a farmhouse far away in the forest, and begged the countess to excuse his absence. He had sent fresh supplies of game, and a goodly company of his men,

knights and housecarles, who would escort her royally to Crowland.

Judith cared little for his absence; he was but an English barbarian. Alfruda was half glad to have him out of the way, lest his now sullen and uncertain temper should break out; and bowed herself to the earth before Judith, who patronised her to her heart's content, and offered her slyly insolent condolences on being married to a barbarian. She herself could sympathise—who more?

Alfruda might have answered with scorn that she was a princess, and of better English blood than Judith's French blood; but she had her ends to gain, and gained them.

For Judith was pleased to be so delighted with her that she kissed her lovingly, and said with much emotion that she required a friend who would support her through her coming trial; and who better than one who herself had suffered so much? Would she accompany her to Crowland?

Alfruda was overjoyed, and away they went.

*Sagas* Songs of the deeds of the old Scandinavian heroes.

*The Countess Judith.* This Judith was the widow of Tostig Godwinson. She was a woman of an evil life.

## CHAPTER LIX

### HOW HERWARD GOT HIS SOUL'S PRICE

HEREWARD had gone home as soon as they had departed, and sat down to eat and drink. His manner was sad and strange. He drank much at the mid-day meal, and then lay down to sleep, setting guards as usual.

After a while he leapt up with a shriek and shudder

They ran to him, asking whether he was ill.

'Ill? No. Yes. Ill at heart. I have had a dream—an ugly dream. I thought that all the men I ever slew on earth came to me with their wounds all gaping, and cried at me, "Our luck then, thy luck now" Chaplain! Is there not a verse somewhere—uncle Brand said it to me

on his deathbed—"Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed"?''

'Text? None such that I know of,' quoth priest Ailward, a graceless fellow, who had taken Leofric's place. 'If that were the law, it would be but few honest men that would die in their beds. Let us drink, and drive girls' fancies out of our heads.'

So they drank again; and Hereward fell asleep once more.

'It is thy turn to watch, priest,' said Winter to Ailward. 'So keep the door well, for I am worn out with hunting,' and so fell asleep.

Ailward shuffled into his harness, and went to the door. The wine was heady; the sun was hot. In a few minutes he was asleep likewise.

Hereward slept, who can tell how long? But at last there was a bustle, a heavy fall; and waking with a start, he sprang up. He saw Ailward lying dead across the door, and above him a crowd of fierce faces, some of which he knew too well. He saw Ivo Taillebois; he saw the Breton, Sir Raoul de Dol; he saw Sir Ascelin, he saw Sir Hugh of Evermue, his own son-in-law; and with them he saw, or seemed to see, the ogre of Cornwall, and Dirk Hammerhand of Walcheren, and many another old foe long underground; and in his ear rang the text—'Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed.' And Hereward knew that his end was come.

There was no time to put on mail or helmet. He saw sword and shield hang on a perch, and tore them down. As he girded the sword on, Winter sprang to his side.

'I have three lances—two for me and one for you, and we can hold the door against twenty.'

'Till they fire the house over our heads. Shall Hereward die like a wolf in a cave? Forward, all The Wake men! A Wake! A Wake!'

And he rushed out upon his fate. No man followed him, save Winter. The rest, dispersed, unarmed, were running hither and thither helplessly

'Brothers in arms, and brothers in Valhalla!' shouted Winter as he rushed after him.

A knight was running to and fro in the court, shouting Hereward's name. 'Where is the villain? Wake! We have caught thee asleep at last'

'I am out,' quoth Hereward, as the man almost stumbled against him; 'and this is in.'

And through shield, and hauberk, and body, went Hereward's javelin, while all drew back, confounded for the moment at that mighty stroke.

'Felons!' shouted Hereward, 'your king has given me his truce; and do you dare break my house, and kill my folk? Is that your French law? And is this your French honour?—To take a man unawares over his meat? Come on, traitors all, and get what you can of a naked man; you will buy it dear—Guard my back, Winter!'

And he ran right at the press of knights; and the fight began. And as he hewed on silently, with grinding teeth, and hard, glittering eyes, of whom did he think? Of Alfruda?

Not so. But of that pale ghost, with great black hollow eyes, who sat in Crowland, with thin bare feet, and sackcloth on her tender limbs, watching, praying, longing, loving, uncomplaining. That ghost had been for many a month the background of all his thoughts and dreams. It was so clear before his mind's eye now, that unawares to himself, he shouted 'Torfrida!' as he struck, and struck the harder at the sound of his old battle-cry.

And now he is all wounded and be-bled; and Winter, who has fought back to back with him, has fallen on his face; and Hereward stands alone, turning from side to side, as he sweeps his sword right and left till the forest rings with the blows, but staggering as he turns. Within a ring of eleven corpses he stands. Who will go in and make the twelfth?

A knight rushes in, to fall headlong down, cloven through the helm: but Hereward's blade snaps short, and he hurls it away as his foes rush in with a shout of joy.

He tears his shield from his left arm, and with it brains two more.

But the end is come Taillebois and Evermue are behind him now; four lances are through his back, and bear him down upon his knees.

'Cut off his head, Breton!' shouted Ivo. Raoul de Dol rushed forward, sword in hand. At that cry Hereward lifted up his dying head. One stroke more ere it was all done for ever.

And with a shout of 'Torfrida!' which made the Bruneswald ring, he hurled the shield full in the Breton's face, and fell forward dead.

The knights drew their lances from that terrible corpse slowly and with caution, as men who have felled a bear, and yet dare not step within reach of the seemingly lifeless paw.

'The dog died hard,' said Ivo. 'Lucky for us that Sir Ascelin had news of his knights being gone to Crowland. If he had had them to back him, we had not done this deed to-day.'

'I must keep my word with him,' said Ascelin, as he struck off the once fair and golden head.

'Ho, Breton,' cried Ivo, 'the villain is dead. Get up, man, and see for yourself. What ails him?'

But when they lifted up Raoul de Dol his brains were running down his face; and all men stood astonished at that last mighty stroke.

'That blow,' said Ascelin, 'will be sung hereafter by minstrel and maiden as the last blow of the last Englishman. Knights, we have slain a better knight than ourselves. If there had been three more such men in this realm, they would have driven us and King William back again into the sea.'

So said Ascelin; those words of his, too, were sung by many a jongleur, Norman as well as English, in the times that were to come.

'Likely enough,' said Ivo; 'but that is the more reason why we should set that head of his up over the



And with a shout of 'Torfida!' which made the Brunwald ring, he hurled the shield fall in the Bretton's face, and fell forward dead —Page 251

hall-door, as a warning to these English churls that their last man is dead, and their last stake thrown and lost.

So perished 'The last of the English'

*Heady.* Intoxicating.

*Dol.* An old town in Brittany.

*Sir Ascelin.* The man from whom Hereward had won Torfrida's favour years before. He was now in possession of estates round Lincoln.

*Breton.* A native of Brittany.

*Valhalla.* The heaven in which the Norse believed that warriors were made happy after their death.

*Naked man* A man without armour.

*Jongleur* A minstrel.

## CHAPTER LX

### HOW TORFRIDA CAME TO BOURNE

It was the third day. The French were drinking in the hall of Bourne, when in the afternoon a servant came in, and told them how a barge full of monks had come to the shore, and that they seemed to be monks from Crowland.

Taillebois growled and cursed; but the monks came up, and into the hall; and at their head the abbot himself, to receive whom all men rose, save Taillebois.

'I come,' said the abbot, in courtly French, 'noble knights, to ask a boon in the name of the Most Merciful, on behalf of a noble and unhappy lady. Let it be enough to have avenged yourself on the living. Gentlemen and Christians war not against the dead.'

'No, no, master abbot!' shouted Taillebois; 'you have enough to keep Crowland in miracles for the present. You shall not make a martyr of a Saxon churl. He wants the barbarian's body, knights, and you will be fools if you let him have it.'

'Churl? Barbarian?' said a haughty voice; and a nun stepped forward who had stood just behind. She was clothed entirely in black. Her bare feet were bleeding



from the stones: her hand, as she lifted it, was as thin as a skeleton's.

She threw back her veil, and showed to the knights what had been once the famous beauty of Torfrida.

But the beauty was long passed away. Her hair was white as snow; her cheeks were fallen in. Her hawk-like features were all sharp and hard. Only in their hollow sockets burned still the great black eyes, so fiercely that all men turned uneasily from her gaze.

'Churl? Barbarian?' she said slowly and quietly, but with an intensity which was more terrible than rage. 'Who gives such names to one who was as much better born and better bred than they who now sit here, as he was braver and more terrible than they? The base wood-cutter's son? The upstart who would have been honoured had he taken service as yon dead man's groom?—'

'Talk to me so, and my stirrup leathers shall make acquaintance with your sides,' said Taillebois.

'Keep them for your wife. Churl? Barbarian? There is not a man within this hall who is not a barbarian compared with him. Give me his body—or bear for ever the name of cowards, and Torfrida's curse.'

She fixed her terrible eyes first on one, and then on another, calling them by name.

'Ivo Taillebois—basest of all—'

'Take the witch's accursed eyes off me!' and he covered his face with his hands. 'I shall be overlooked—planet-struck. Hew the witch down! Take her away!'

'Hugh of Evermue—The dead man's daughter is yours, and the dead man's lands. Are not these remembrances enough of him? Are you so fond of his memory that you need his corpse likewise?'

'Give it her! Give it her!' said he, hanging down his head like a rated cur.

'Ascelin of Lincoln, once Ascelin of Ghent—There was a time when you would have done—what would you not?—for one glance of Torfrida's eyes. Stay. Do not deceive yourself, fair sir. Torfrida means to ask no favour of you,

or of living man. But she commands you. Do the thing she bids, or with one glance of her eye she sends you childless to your grave.'

'Madam! Lady Torfrida! What is there I would not do for you? What have I done now, save avenge your great wrong?'

Torfrida made no answer. but fixed steadily on him eyes which widened every moment.

'But, madam'—and he turned shrinking from the fancied spell—'what would you have? The—the corpse? It is in the keeping of—of another lady.'

'So?' said Torfrida quietly. 'Leave her to me'; and she swept past them all, and flung open the bower door at their backs, discovering Alfruda sitting by the dead

'Out!' cried she. 'Out, siren, with fairy's face and tail of fiend, and leave the husband with his wife!'

Alfruda looked up, shrieked, and then, with the sudden passion of a weak nature, drew a little knife, and sprang up.

Torfrida smiled, and fixed her snake's eye upon her wretched rival.

Alfruda shuddered, and fled shrieking into an inner room

'Now, knights, give me—that which hangs outside.'

The head was already taken down. A tall lay brother, the moment he had seen it, had climbed the gable, snatched it away, and now sat in a corner of the yard, holding it on his knees, talking to it, chiding it, as if it had been alive. When men had offered to take it, he had drawn a battle-axe from under his frock, and threatened to brain all comers. And the monks had warned off Ascelm, saying that the man was mad, and had Berserk fits of superhuman strength and rage.

'He will give it me,' said Torfrida, and went out.

'Look at that gable, foolish head,' said the madman. 'Ten years ago, you and I took down from thence another head. O foolish head, to get yourself at last into that same place! Why would you not be ruled by her, you foolish golden head?'

‘Martin!’ said Torfrida.

‘Take it and comb it, mistress, as you used to do. Comb out the golden locks again, fit to shine across the battlefield. She has let them all get tangled into elf-knots, that lazy slut within.’

Torfrida took it from his hands, dry-eyed, and went in.

Then the monks silently took up the bier, and all went forth, and down the Roman road toward the fen. They laid the corpse within the barge, and slowly rode away.

‘And past the Deeping, down the Welland stream,  
By winding reaches on, and shining meres  
Between gray reeds, between green alder-beds,  
And the brown horror of the homeless fen,  
A dirge of monks and wail of women rose  
In vain to heaven for the last Englishman,  
Then died far off within the boundless mist,  
And left the Frenchman master of the land.’

So Torfrida took the corpse home to Crowland, and buried it in the choir, after which she did not die, but lived on many years, spending all day in nursing and feeding the Countess Godiva, and lying all night on Hereward’s tomb, and praying that he might find grace and mercy in that day.

And at last Godiva died, and they took her away, and buried her with great pomp in her own minster-church of Coventry.

And after that Torfrida died likewise, because she had nothing else for which to live. And they laid her in Hereward’s grave, and their dust is mingled to this day.

*Veritable.* Real, actual.

*Siren.* An enticing woman.

*Chiding* Speaking reproachfully.

THE END

